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Beyond Rope and Fence



DAVID GREW

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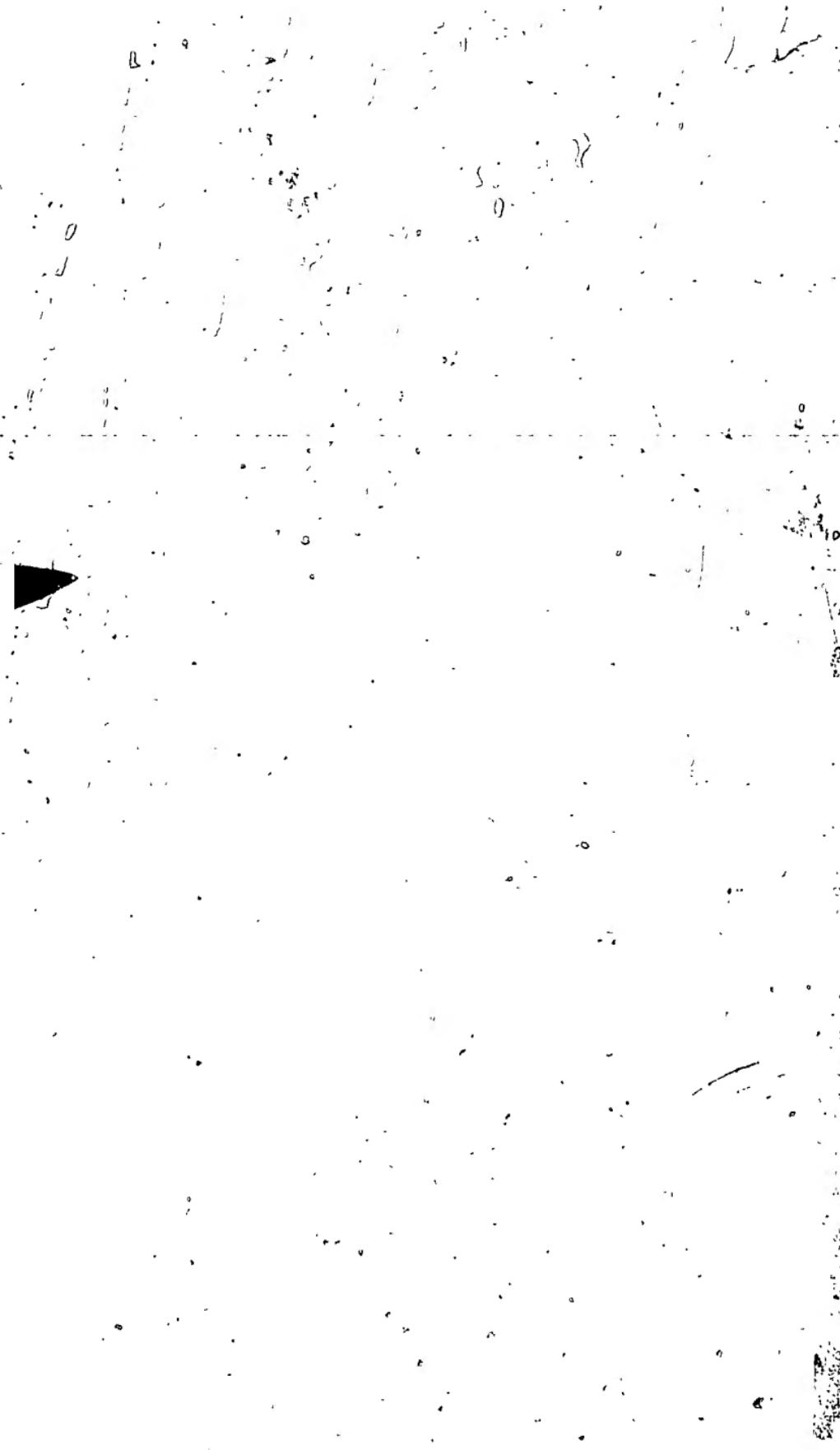
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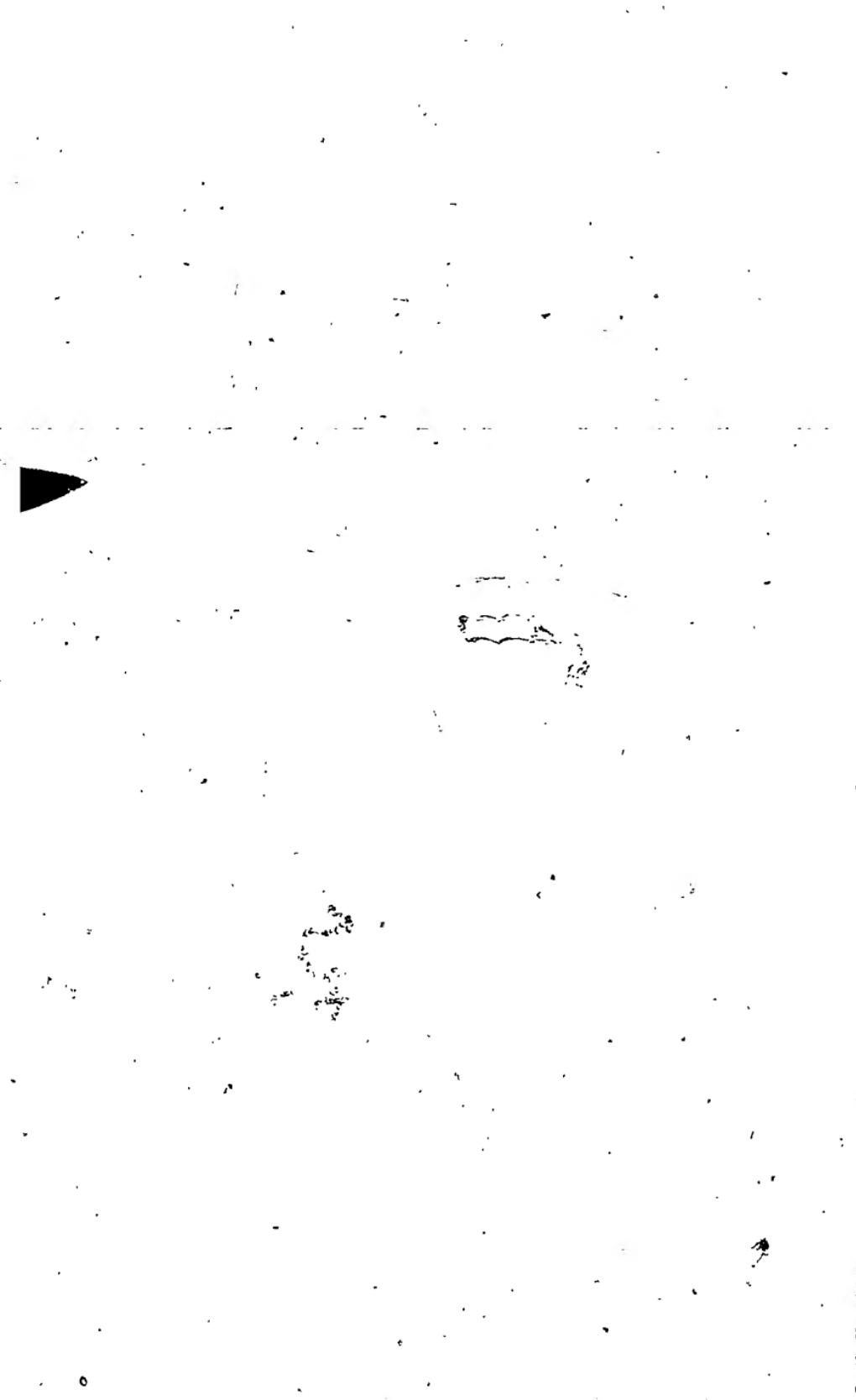
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Beyond Rope and Fence



Chapter One

CORRAL WALLS

ROLLING HILLS and shallow valleys—an ocean of brown waves with fast-drying sloughs, like patches of sunshine on the bosom of the sea—such was the Canadian prairie that autumn day, such were the miles and miles of Alberta range, bounded by a barbed-wire fence which was completely lost in the unobstructed play of sunshine. It was an open wilderness which reached beyond the horizon. The horizon itself lay desolate and unbroken like a rusty iron ring, girding the earth. The immensity of space, by contrast, dwarfed everything which crept over the surface of the plains into a helpless sort of puniness.

The hundred horses on the range, grouped and scattered by their likes and dislikes of each other, looked from the distance like ants crawling over the surface of a rock. Within sight of each other, bound as they were by the ties of race, they nevertheless had their loves and social preferences.

Most of the mothers with their little colts grazed to one side of the herd, out of the possible danger of being hurt by some outburst of exuberance on the part of the young adult horses; and a few of the mothers among

these, as if they regarded their children as more precious than their neighbor's children, kept to themselves.

Among this last group was a shapely, light-brown or buckskin mare who was grazing peacefully around her delicate little buckskin daughter. The little thing was asleep on the grass. Her thin, graceful legs were stretched as far as she could stretch them. Her beautiful little head lay flat on the ground. Her fluffy tail was thrown back on the grass with complete abandon.

She was only six months old but already the very image of her mother. From the white strip on her forehead and the heavy black mane to the unequal white spots on her two hind fetlocks, she was like her. Only her wiry, delicately wrought legs seemed somewhat too long for her.

Suddenly the old mare's head went up high in the air. Her teeth ceased grinding with the abruptness of a machine which, in breaking, comes to an unexpected stop. Her round, knowing eyes peered anxiously through the warm haze in the atmosphere.

The small head on the grass also raised a little bit, looked inquiringly at its beloved mother, saw her quite near, and with absolute confidence in that nearness, dropped back again, rubbing its muzzle against the fragrant grass in an ecstasy of contentment.

But the old mare continued gazing suspiciously, remaining motionless—like a stone. She saw that most of the rest of the horses were as alert as she was, watching the small, moving objects—two men on horseback—which had broken over the line of shadow along the southern horizon.

One of the two men had loped off toward the right and the other toward the left. The old mare had already lived twenty years in the precarious relationship of horse to man. Not only had she herself suffered at the hands of these little creatures who ruled the world, but she had had many of her babies taken away from her and abused by them—several times before her very eyes. Her mother's heart began to beat fast and apprehensively.

The other mares, not far from her, began to show signs of extreme nervousness. Some began running off short distances, as if in panic, stopping every few feet and gazing anxiously at the approaching riders, putting their colts and themselves on guard with this show of fear.

The buckskin mare looked for a moment questioningly toward the north. That was the way to go, for the ranch buildings were in the south. But already the two riders, now to the side of them, were racing northward and she knew that they would get beyond them and turn upon them to drive them toward the ranch.

She called nervously to her little one with that strange tremulous whinny which she used only in time of danger. The filly sprang at once to her feet, sidled up to her mother, and from the protection of those big, warm, throbbing sides, peered wide-eyed at the tiny dark forms of the riders who were now coming together in the north.

Until she had seen a group of horsemen dismount one day, the little buckskin filly had thought that man was a strange sort of horse with a frightening hump on its back. What little she had been able to learn about him since had served only to intensify her fear of him; and despite her abiding confidence in her mother, she began to

tremble as she heard the telltale hoofbeats coming nearer and nearer.

The horses all instinctively gathered together in a bunch and, since the riders were north of them, raced full speed toward the canyon in the south. But while one of the horsemen remained some distance behind them, ready to prevent the group from swerving to the side, the other one plunged right into their midst and cleverly separated the mothers and their colts from the rest of the herd. Then they allowed the single horses to run off northward as they pleased, and got together behind the mothers and their colts, driving them toward the canyon which, from the level plains where they were, looked like a snaky shadow just short of the horizon and parallel to it.

That long line of shadow widened as they neared it; and when they reached the lip of the canyon, they saw the shining, narrow stream of the Red Deer River, way down on its flat bottom. From the jaws of the mouth of the canyon which were more than a mile apart, the prairie floor fell away sheer in places to a depth of a thousand feet. Here and there, there were cuts in the canyon lip, ravinelike gouges in the level edge. Where the elements, throughout the ages, had failed to remove the loose earth, it lay along the slope in steep hills which rose from those slopes like giant teeth, crumbling more or less, dotted with stones and covered here and there with blotches of sagebrush and cacti.

In the middle of the flat canyon bottom, between the jagged slopes and the river shore, stood the mushroomlike buildings of the ranch. The house, a small wooden building with shingled sides, stood on the eastern end of the

long ranch yard, while opposite and facing it, was the huge red barn with its open door below and the square, gaping window space in the loft above. North of the barn and against its blind wall, there was a big corral, divided into two sections by a partition. The corral walls as well as the partition were made of logs, laid horizontally about a foot apart and rising to a height of some six feet. Each of the two sections had heavy swinging gates which opened inward.

Helplessly, the mothers and their colts poured down the steep incline between the giant teeth, into the canyon, slipping, sliding and leaping riskily over the stones in their way.

On the level bottom of the canyon, the buckskin mare made an attempt to get beyond the rancher's buildings to the river, but one of the horsemen immediately shot by her like a flash of light, heading her off. She knew enough of the bitter futility of trying to balk against the will of man; and so she turned back into the dust-clouded stream of mothers and colts with an angry shake of her wise old head.

But whatever the old mare, wise in experience, felt about this excitement, since all they had had to do so far was run, the little buckskin filly shook all fear from her heart and clinging desperately to the protecting side of her mother, took what pleasure she could from the exhilaration of the escapade itself. Healthy to the last cell of her body, the race had merely accelerated the circulation of her blood; and the ease with which she found herself able to keep up with her mother made her conscious of a great and thrilling power within herself. Her eyes

dilated, her nostrils distended, her mane bristling and her tail unfurled, her springy legs carried her along, an expression of joy and abandonment in the motion of her graceful body.

The gates of the corral stood wide open. Being so driven that they could not swerve to either side, half the mothers and their colts poured into one section of the corral and half into the other. At the opposite walls of the corral, inside, finding no way of getting out, they stopped and turned to look back toward the gates, and they saw the two men closing them.

The knowledge that they were imprisoned, trapped in those unbreakable walls of heavy logs, terrified them. In their utter helplessness, they raced aimlessly around and around the corral, churning up the earth under their hoofs and filling the air with clouds of dust so thick that it became hard to breathe.)

When the wiser ones realized that it was getting them nowhere and only adding to their discomfort, they settled back near the gates in a bunch and, looking over the corral walls and between the logs, watched the ominous activities of the two men in the yard.

They saw one man building a fire in the center of the yard; while the other was calmly manipulating a long iron rod, as if he were pawing the smoking flames with it.

The little buckskin filly, close against her mother's side, was wedged into the corner between her mother and the logs of the corral wall; her frightened eyes, in the middle of the space between two of the logs, could see the rancher's house on the other side of the yard.

Her flanks were still throbbing from exertion when

the house door opened and she saw a little girl come out of it. The buckskin filly didn't know what kind of animal that was, except that she guessed it was a sort of man. She noticed with no little fear that the small girl was coming, hopping and skipping, directly toward the corral. The little filly pressed hard against her mother's side, but her mother, absorbed in the activities of the men, did not move an inch.

When suddenly the little buckskin felt the touch of the girl's hand on her back, she called out frantically to her mother. The old mare lowered her soft warm lips, caressed her on the forehead and along her back and neck, murmured reassuringly, but again raised her head over the top log and continued staring at the men.

By that time the filly realized that, uncomfortable as it was to have this little man-thing touching her, it was not hurting her. She decided to tolerate it, while her one dilated eye guarded against anything the little girl might do which *would* hurt.

Then the strange girl in her brightly colored dress climbed up two of the logs and moved slowly toward the frightened buckskin's head, talking softly and coaxingly as she moved.

The filly listened with ears pricked high. In the stream of meaningless prattle, the little filly became aware of one sound: the sound of the word "Queen," which the girl repeated many times. Somehow, as the girl repeated that word, more and more endearingly, the filly began to feel that there was no ill-will, no hurt of any kind in the intentions of the strange creature, and her fear turned to curiosity.

There was something very disarming about the soft voice which came through between the logs; and she cautiously put her muzzle through the space between the logs, toward the pink little face from which the soft sounds were coming. When the tremulous lip touched the warm skin, the girl turned abruptly and kissed it, crowing with delight. The filly pulled back, eyes dilating and ears pricked forward, but immediately reached toward her again; and the little girl, more excited than ever now, kept calling: "You're my little Queen; you're my little Queen."

This unofficial christening was interrupted by a sudden outburst of excitement on the other side of the partition. As the mothers and their colts in the other section broke into another helpless whirling around that side of the corral, the mothers and colts on Queen's side joined them in a similar, blind churning; and the clouds of dust shut out the yard and swallowed up the little girl.

For a quarter of an hour they raced around blindly, before they realized that the men were not interested in them nor their part of the corral. When they had withdrawn to the farthest corner of their section and the dust had settled somewhat, Queen saw a man on the other side of the partition rush toward a big black mare with a long stick. She saw him strike the colt that tried to follow the mare and saw the colt run back into the corral, while the mother was being driven out and away by the second man. In this way, the two men drove out all the mares and kept all the colts in the corral. The air was filled with the whinnies for help on the part of the colts, and the helpless answers from their mothers outside.

The mares and colts around Queen, frightened as they were, had moved off as far as they could in their own section of the corral and were looking on. Queen saw a rope flash through the air, and immediately after she saw a colt fall to the dusty ground with a cry to his mother for help. The anxious neigh which his mother sent through the air in response stirred the mothers in Queen's section of the corral, and they began whirling around the dusty square again, blindly expressing their desire to escape, yet so despairing of finding an opening in the sturdy log walls that they didn't even look for it.

When once more they slowed down and stopped in the farthest corner, there was a frightening odor of blood and burning flesh in the air. The smell of the branding further terrified them and again mothers and colts took to whirling foolishly around. As soon as they stopped again, another colt was thrown and branded, and again the cries of pain and fear and the smell of burning hide sent them racing through the dust.

It took the two men the greater part of the afternoon to brand all the colts in the first section of the corral; and when that half of their labor was finished, their faces wet with perspiration and black with layers of dust, the men retired to the ranch house for a few minutes' rest and a refreshing drink. By that time all the colts who had been branded had been released and with their frantic mothers were racing away up the incline to the freedom of the prairies on the range above.

The mothers and colts in Queen's section of the corral stood looking after them enviously till the last of them had vanished beyond the rim of the canyon.

A kindly silence lowered upon the ranch yard, and Queen, like most of the other colts in the corral, took advantage of the peace and quiet to help herself to her mother's milk. Before they were half through their supper, however, they were interrupted by the sudden re-appearance of the two men. The skin on the buckskin mare's flanks began to vibrate, and the old mare suddenly pulled away to plunge once more into the foolish and frenzied revolving around the dusty corral.

One man came through the big gate carrying a long stick, while the other man remained at the swinging gate holding it open slightly. The man with the long stick forced the mothers and their colts into one corner of the corral; then, after a long struggle, he singled out the buckskin mare, separating her from the rest and driving her toward the gate.

The old mare had gotten halfway out of the gateway when she heard the frantic cry for help from little Queen. Rebelliously rearing up on her hind legs, the old mare turned back. She struck the gate with all her weight, just as the man was trying to shut it behind her. The gate swung violently out of her way, knocking the gate-man off his feet and striking with a crash against the corral wall.

The man with the big stick ran to help his companion up from the ground. The gateway open, Queen joined her mother. Out they all went as fast as they could go, the buckskin mare in the lead.

Before the man with the big stick had dragged his companion out of the corral, the mares and their colts were halfway up the incline of the canyon slope on their

frenzied race for the range above, the buckskin mare now puffing and snorting as she beat her way up the steep grade, little Queen bravely pattering along after her. The old mare was very nervous. She was not only eager to get to the range with her little daughter, but she vaguely realized that she had crossed the man's will; and that, her experience warned her, was a punishable offense.

The men, on the other hand, had several disadvantages. Besides one of them having been weakened, almost incapacitated by the blow of the swinging gate, they knew that before they could resaddle their ponies, these mares and their colts would reach the flat prairie on the range above and join the other mares and their colts, and perhaps also the rest of the horses of the range. They realized, too, that after all the excitement of the day, the horses would be nervous and wary, much harder to round-up than ordinarily. The day was already waning; so they postponed the completion of the branding to some other day, when the mares and their colts had gotten over their fright somewhat.

Having no way of knowing that the two men were not going to pursue and recapture them at once, the rebellious mares and their colts raced recklessly up the incline, the perspiration coming out in foam upon their necks and sides, rocks and sand rolling thunderously down behind them, dust rising from their feet like the smoke of a prairie fire.

When they finally reached the level plains above the canyon, the old buckskin mare led the mothers and their colts westward. Having been rounded up in the hollow, directly north of them, she was wise enough to feel that

the men would be sure to come back there to look for them. The desire to get under cover and keep out of sight sent her galloping anxiously for a deep ravine, a mile and a half to the west, where she remembered clumps of wild cherry trees deep down its steep slopes.

Although Queen now protested from time to time against the strain of so much loping, the old mare did not slacken her pace till she reached the deep cut in the prairie floor and saw the cherry trees in the V-shaped cut before her. And even here, though she slowed down considerably, she was not yet ready to rest. Trotting down to the old cattle trail, along the very bottom of the ravine, she continued going northward on it until the barbed-wire fence of the range forced her to end her flight.

Here at last they gathered into a bunch and, looking back guardedly, began to graze. The old buckskin mare, like most of the other mothers, kept a careful watch, continuously raising her wise old head and studying the rim of the ravine for the first sight or sound of approaching riders.

Most of the colts went back to their supper, so rudely interrupted in the corral; and when that evening meal was completed, each of them found a soft spot on the grass near where their mothers were grazing and, stretching out, went to sleep.

In a few hours, none the worse physically for the exertions of the day, Queen got up and proceeded to find grass for herself, as her mother had been encouraging her to do for some time. She was feeling extremely good after her rest, even better than she had ever felt before.

If Queen, however, was inclined to regard the wild

chase over the prairie and down the canyon slopes to the ranch yard as an escapade, as so much fun, her mother's nervous watchfulness, which had not abated in the least, had nonetheless deepened the impression made upon Queen that man was a creature to be afraid of, to guard against. No matter how peacefully she appeared to be grazing, the buckskin mare would stop every other minute, look back along the ravine to the top, or walk up to the fence and with her head above the topmost strand of barbed-wire, press her chest against the barbs and look hungrily up the rest of the ravine and to the line of the flat prairie above, stretching away indefinitely toward the north.

Where the V-shaped ravine bottom brought the two slopes to a point, the barbed-wire fence was most alluringly high. That spot fascinated the old mare. It gave her the feeling that, with a little effort, she could push her way under there and out of the range fence. Somewhere in the back of her mind was a vague cluster of memories of just such a situation, of a strand of wire hanging high, of her getting down on her knees somehow and pushing her way out to freedom.

She stood there for seemingly endless hours and gazed; and when she wearied of doing that and after she had gone off to the grazing which was a grim necessity, she kept coming back to the wire, sniffing above and below it and looking hungrily away into the north.

Sometimes, her fear of the riders becoming especially intense, the buckskin mare would begin to imagine them up there on the prairies above and behind her, and she would suddenly go tripping up the west slope of the

ravine to get a long view of those plains. The rest of the mothers, catching the contagious fear from her, would go racing after her, their frightened colts at their sides. Then, seeing no sign of any riders, she would lead them back down to the ravine and take up her study of the barbed-wire strands which were preventing her escape to the north, away from the river canyon and the ranch yard.

Every time she returned to that fence, her memory of an experience with such a barbed wire in the dim past became clearer, and the impulse to try to get out became stronger. Finally, getting down on her knees, the old buckskin mare pushed her head under the lowest strand of wire and began slowly to reach forward. The sense of being on the other side encouraged her and she began crawling forward more and more eagerly, more and more nervously.

Then her withers struck a barb in the wire and the pain as it broke through the skin halted her a moment. Her intention now was to lower herself a bit more, out of its reach, when out of the rosebush just a few feet from her nose leaped a jack rabbit. In her fright, the buckskin mare sprang to her feet. The sharp burning pain in her withers as the barb ripped a cut several inches long gave her the feeling that she was caught in a trap. Foolishly she reared on her hind legs to pull out of it. The strand of wire snapped with a loud *ping* as from a tuning fork, one end of the broken wire tearing a gash along her shoulder.

Somehow, though her fright urged her back into the range and away from that wire, she found herself out-

side of the fence with the next upper strand of wire now behind her. Instead of going backward she sprang away northward, up the ravine.

Queen was afraid of the fence and the hanging wires, having been hurt by barbed-wire fences several times in the past; but the idea of being separated from her mother was unendurable. With a nervous, frightened lope she ran under the wire and to her mother's side. Soon one of the other mares came trotting along, afraid and yet eager and bursting with curiosity. In a few minutes the entire group was excitedly trotting up the ravine slopes to the open prairies.

Up on the plains, free to lope northward away from the direction of the ranch, they fled for the greater part of an hour. But the colts were tired of this constant running and the old mares were hungry. The grass up on those unoccupied wild prairies was especially high and inviting; and so, coming to what seemed like a secluded hollow, they stopped to graze.

While the buckskin mare went at her grazing as greedily as the rest of them, she was far more nervous than any of them. She had broken out of the corral and she had broken out of the fence. Besides a guilty sense of having resisted the will of man, her neck and shoulders were hurting where the wires had cut her and the feeling of warm trickling blood was frightening.

The late autumn nights had steadily grown colder, and since the hollows are generally cooler than the higher portions of the prairie ground, the coldness kept them stirring around; and so the buckskin mare soon started them on northward again. Grazing close together, lips

often touching lips as they seized the bunches of grass and ripped them from the earth, they pushed slowly northward. When the colts, too weary to go on any farther, began lying down, one by one, they were some four miles north of the range.

When dawn came the earth and the grass blades were white with frost; the rising sun put a tinge of pinkish lavender into the wide whiteness of the slopes which faced it. The lazy colts who were still sleeping were soon awakened by the cold.

As more and more of the colts began getting up, those who were not particularly hungry, or were colder than they were hungry, began chasing each other in play, circling about the group of mares who were busily cropping the grass and moving along.

The old buckskin mare was glad to see them so active. The nervousness which had seized her when first the men had come to round up the mares and their colts was now greatly intensified by the large lumps of coagulated blood on her neck and shoulders, only a small portion of which she could reach with her lips. The loss of blood, much of which had trickled down her foreleg, put her into an extreme state of apprehension which gave her no peace unless she was in flight. Time after time she led the herd on a frightened race northward until the unwilling older mares and some of the tired colts would rebel. Then she was obliged to stop again and graze a while.

Moving along in that way, all morning, they came toward noon to a slough where the grass around a large oval pond was so high and luscious that there was little chance of dragging the herd away from it. Trying to lead

them on again, after they had drunk their fill, the buckskin mare finally settled down on the north slope of the hollow and grazed like the rest, interrupting her grazing constantly with anxious looks southward, trying each time she looked up to get at the painful wounds on neck and shoulder.

It was in the middle of the afternoon that the old mare was disturbed by the sound of honking geese. Looking up, she found them in the north sky, their familiar V-formation moving across overhead and southward. The buckskin watched them anxiously as long as their constantly growing-smaller specks were visible.

She was about to go back to her grazing when right below the last tiny speck, a short distance above the southern horizon, she discovered two small dark objects coming toward them over the prairie. The men were coming again! She watched them just long enough to have other mares become concerned and look up like her; then with her nervous frenzied call, which the herd had come to know so well, she loped around in a wild circle till she had the whole group sufficiently worried; then she galloped away to the north, Queen at her side, the herd directly behind her.

Until the herd showed signs of wearying of the chase and she herself, weakened by the loss of blood, could feel the blood trickling again from the wound on her neck, the buckskin mare galloped and trotted by turns. On a wide ridgetop they grazed for about half an hour. Suddenly, looking up, the buckskin mare saw the men on horseback coming again, this time considerably nearer.

She had little difficulty arousing the herd this time. Old

mares and lazy colts, all thoroughly alert, eyes dilated and nostrils distended, they began their flight northward in real earnest.

For several hours they fled into the heart of a vast, unpopulated wilderness. When the shadows of the early autumn evening began lengthening to the side of them, they came to a hilltop from which they saw another one of those prairie sloughs with a good-sized pond shimmering in its muddy center. Here they stopped to drink and to graze, remaining till long after the night had settled down; then they moved on again.

They came late in the night to an old abandoned haystack in the middle of a swampy hollow. As the buckskin mare, now terribly weak and tired, stopped to survey the field and the shadowed stack, the night lay over the land like a flood of solid darkness. Not a single light gleamed anywhere in the black distances of the prairie, nor was there a trace in the air of any barnyard smell. She could make out a number of horses resting against the hay, and she could see one or two grazing a short distance to the side.

A cold wind had blown up from the west and the buckskin mare wanted to get into the protection of the haystack. She moved forward a few feet and stopped to sniff; and the herd moved along cautiously behind her. Several times they moved forward in that manner, stopping each time to make sure, and then the buckskin mare saw the shapes of several horses lying at the base of the stack.

The haystack was a very old one, abandoned several years ago, and the smell that came from it was half

rotten; but with the pungent odor of rotten hay came the smell of warm horse bodies, and the buckskin called out inquiringly.

In answer to her call a white body close to the stack raised itself laboriously from the ground and, taking a step forward, replied with a lazy, sleepy whinny. Immediately the buckskin mare and the little group back of her, started forward toward the haystack.

The buckskin mare found the white body to be a good-natured white mare and as soon as they had sniffed noses, the white mare hurried back to her warm place before it was taken from her. Beside her, as Queen's mother followed her to the stack, was a jet black colt who was complaining impatiently because his mother had disturbed his sleep by getting up.

The hay was too old to be appetizing, but they had not come there to eat. What they wanted was shelter from the penetrating wind which was especially tormenting the buckskin mare by probing at her open wounds. As soon as the first formalities of whinnying assurances were over, each mare and her colt went looking for the warmest place still available along the haystack.

In her eager search in the darkness, the buckskin mare almost stepped on the leg of an old work horse, but the old fellow whinnied good-naturedly and she decided to lie down right beside him. Queen pushed herself into the hay between the old work horse and her mother; thus protected against the wind, she was soon very comfortably cosy and fell asleep.

Chapter Two

ON TO THE NORTH!

IT WAS IN the very early hours of the morning that Queen was awakened by the sudden rising of her mother, upon whose warm flank her muzzle had been resting comfortably. As she became fully awake, she heard horses stirring about, saw some of them moving nervously in the faint early light, and noticed on the breeze a frightening odor of fire. Her mother was standing just a few feet away next to the white mare, and when Queen pushed her way in between them she saw a crescent of reddish light along the southwestern horizon.

Far away as the prairie fire was, Queen could see the flames moving, rising higher at various points, or dropping lower and appearing to be going out. It was this movement, little as they could see of it, that frightened them. The ragged flames looked like a herd of creatures of some sort, among which every now and then, one could be seen leaping up slightly higher than the rest, all moving in a threatening chase toward them.

Fire had always been a very definite part of the activities of the men in the ranch yard, but fire in the ranch yard had always been small and fixed—this fire was un-

mistakably wide and on the move, coming along as if in pursuit.

The skin on Queen's flanks quivered with fear. She couldn't understand why the big horses kept standing there and looking. She wanted to run, to get off in the opposite direction, and she trotted restlessly from one side to the other, taking a frightened peek at the fire, every time she came in front of her mother.

The black colt on the other side of the white mare didn't seem to be much afraid. He had not been chased and had not had to run and his experiences in life had not yet included fire. The red light interested him. It was very far away and was not hurting him any. Having slept well and fed well, and feeling strong and fully awake, he wanted to frisk about and play. As Queen was tripping around from one side of her mother to the other, the black colt butted her with his head from behind, pushing her halfway out from between the two mares.

Queen was much too perturbed and tired to tolerate his playfulness. With an impatient toss of her pretty head, she moved back against her mother and called for help. The old mare herself was in no mood for trifling. She drove the black colt off with an angry threat of her teeth. The white mare, who was just as indulgent a mother as the buckskin, neighed in a disgruntled manner and walked off with an angry backward kick of one of her heavy hind legs.

As the buckskin looked after her a moment, displeased, a sudden blast of wind came whirling toward them, leaving a streak of burnt-grass odor in the air which stirred up the entire herd. A hurried clatter of hoofs to the side

sent all of the mares and their colts galloping away for dear life.

On to the north they went, up rugged hills, down slopes, through hollows and valleys, leaping over badger holes and stones and around muddy sloughs and shrinking ponds, stopping on every hilltop to look back, feeling each time they looked that the fire behind them was nearer.

With the coming of morning, the flames lost their brightness; the colts, tired of the constant running now that the fire seemed less threatening in daylight, began to lag wearily behind. The mothers, who felt that even though the flames were no longer so bright, the fire was still steadily gaining upon them, continued running on ahead. However, they slowed down from time to time when they got too far away from their colts for comfort, waiting for them until they had come up quite close, only to leap away again as soon as the colts reached them.

In that uncertain painful way, the mothers galloped along and the colts dragged unwillingly behind them. The wind, meantime, steadily increased as the sun rose higher, and the fire moved more and more swiftly after them. As the frantic mothers stopped from time to time to look back, they saw more and more of the prairie turned black, the smoke rising in angry cloudlets from the unseen hollows behind, rising over the round hilltops and giving them the feeling of some living thing still coming after them.

The old buckskin mare had long given up the leadership of this desperate flight. The loss of blood from her barbed-wire wounds had weakened her and she had all

she could do to lumber along breathlessly at the rear end of the fleeing herd. At that, little Queen was ten feet behind her as she lumbered along, snorting for breath and bobbing her head, so tired that she could barely see her mother ahead of her. Fortunately, few of the colts were any less worn out, and with all the horror of the fire in the near distance and the smell of burning grass in the air, Queen could at least make out vaguely different colts' heads, bobbing as wearily as hers in the smoke-like vagueness of the world they were racing through.

Early in the afternoon, a sudden gust of wind sent a burning thistle out of the fire and into the midst of the straggling colts, setting the grass at their feet afire as it rolled. The colts immediately sprang forward with new life; and as they joined the mares, all of them galloped away as if their weariness had suddenly left them.

For the rest of the afternoon, they managed to keep up a goodly pace, trotting and loping by turns, their sides wet with perspiration, their throats dry, their eyes too weary to see clearly, jogging along like automatons. When the bright light of the afternoon began softening into evening and the shadows began reaching out to the side, they slowed down to a laborious walk.

They came at twilight to the top of a ridge from where they beheld a long, brackish slough, where most of the horses who had spent the night before around the haystack were already grazing leisurely.

There was no water in the slough. Where the water had been earlier in the season, there was instead a flat oval space of black dried mud, and this was framed by a residue of alkali salt. But there was still a feeling of

dampness above the dry rushes at one side, and as the weary mares and their colts slowed down to look for water, they realized that the smell of fire had vanished from the air. The atmosphere was clean and cool and the dew, forming on the grass, helped to allay the painful dryness of their throats.

Queen's throat was very dry, too, but she no longer possessed the energy to concern herself with that. The herd was obviously not going on any further for a while and she could no longer resist the overwhelming heaviness which had been dragging her down to the ground. On a soft spot of grass, a few yards from the brackish shore of the dried up pond, she collapsed in an intoxication of relief. She stretched out her legs, dropped her befuddled head flat on the ground and sank most willingly into the stupor that swept over her, hanging on only to the first few reassuring sounds of her mother and the other mares cropping grass right around her.

But the dryness of her throat did not let Queen rest very long. She woke in the early night to hear the sound of restless feet moving off into space. She raised her head in an anxious search for her mother, and found the big mare lying down only two or three feet away. Tired as she still was, Queen made no attempt to stretch out again. Her throat was dry and her tongue was parched; but when she tried to get milk from her mother, the old buckskin mare groaned as if she did not have the strength to get up.

Most of the herd was already high on the northern rim of the hollow, moving off in the night breeze; the slower mares and their colts were already on the other side of

the muddy center of the slough, going after them. Realizing that she was being left behind, the big mare got up on her feeble legs and stood there, trembling slightly for a few minutes. Queen took this time to try to get the meal she had been too weary to get earlier, but her mother strangely had no milk for her.

The old mare murmured wearily and started off after the rest of the herd. Queen followed her, complaining petulantly as she went.

They were off on their search for water, all moving forward as by the same impulse. There had been no communication, no conveying of facts from one to the other. Every throat was parched and in the mind of each was the image of soft, cool, yielding water, of rippling and gurgling and refreshing coolness, a composite of all the sloughs and ponds in which they had been refreshed in their lives before; and in this search for water, they continued their steady migration northward.

The heavy frost on the grass, next morning, relieved the dryness of their throats slightly; but by the time the sun was high in the heavens, they were as thirsty as ever, and the desire for water kept them steadily on their march northward. They had covered many miles in this flight without seeing water, so it did not occur to any of them to seek it by going back.

All day they moved on slowly, grazing and looking for water, moving on by spurts when the urge to drink stirred the greatest number of them at once. At early evening, they came at last to another slough and found a water-hole about fifty feet long at one end of the muddy bottom.

The rougher work-horses made a dash for the easiest, most approachable end of the water-hole; and so the mares and their colts ventured timidly on to the mud at the opposite end.

One of the mares made a hole in the ice with her hoof, and mares and colts crowded close to her, stretched their long necks, and eagerly drank, nose touching nose. The stronger and the more aggressive drank first, and the weaker and the more patient waited behind them. When those who waited began to fear that there would be no water left and became impatient, they merely pushed at the drinkers and neighed reprovingly. Some pushed the drinkers a bit more impatiently, and a few even nipped them in the rump; but there was no fighting nor real quarreling; and when the drinkers finally backed out upon the dry hard mud, and the last of the herd had had his drink, they spread out along the slopes of the hollow and took to grazing with an earnestness designed to make up for time lost in their flight.

A strange, subtle fear came upon Queen as she waited to get her drink. Her mother who had always been the most aggressive, the first to drink when mares and colts approached a pond or drinking-hole, had now held back forlornly and waited. Not until the good-natured sorrel work-horse, whose feebleness made him inclined to move along with the mares and their colts, the fellow against whose warm old sides Queen had rested that strange night at the haystack, had come up to the hole, had she ventured to move toward the water. And when she backed off again to the grass, and Queen made an attempt to get her milk, she began turning around painfully in a

circle, groaning as she did so. While Queen stood watching her, puzzled, the old mare lay down, whereas all the other mares went off to graze.

Queen protested impatiently, nudging her mother to get up; but the old mare only grunted wearily; and as Queen nosed her back and mane, to learn if possible what was wrong, her little muzzle came upon the ugly wounds along the old mare's neck and shoulders, and she shrank away from them.

Being very hungry now, Queen cropped the grass half-heartedly, staying near her mother and returning every few minutes to nudge her to get up. Always the old mare murmured patiently and affectionately, but she did not get up so that Queen could get her milk.

Night came again. The wind changed completely, coming now cold and sharp out of the southeast. The sky was clear, but in the north, above the horizon, pearly, pinkish lights appeared which seemed to move across the great dome from side to side.

The old buckskin mare remained lying on the ground, dozing. When the other mares were ready to sleep, they came and lay down a few feet away, their colts close beside them. Lying down so that she could rest her muzzle on her mother's warm flank, as she loved to do, Queen gazed at the northern lights. Those strange lights worried her, but since none of the old mares seemed concerned about them, she soon fell asleep.

She had slept a long time when she was awakened by the sound of anxious neighing which seemed far away and yet filled the air above the hollow. Upon opening her eyes she saw the northern lights still shimmering

across the sky; as her mother painfully struggled to her feet, almost turning Queen over in doing so, she became aware of the smell of burning grass in the air again. She thought for a moment that the bright lights had something to do with it; but when she got to her feet and saw that the bulk of the herd was now moving up the slope from the mud flats, in the direction of those lights, Queen realized that the smell of fire was coming from the opposite direction.

Hoofbeats were subtly drumming upon the frosted ground all around them. Most of the mares and colts were on their way northward; and the oldest and the feeblest of them were now, like her mother, rising and taking after them. The old sorrel work-horse, who had been lying a few yards away, was lumbering off; and the buckskin mare, limping slightly, hurried after him. Queen, running along with her, racing ahead and around her, took advantage of her mother's slowness to look around and to see where the smell of fire was coming from.

Dawn came as they lumbered along, the old sorrel work-horse a hundred yards behind the slowest of the mares, the old buckskin mare a few feet behind him, Queen stepping along beside her in no great hurry. The frost thawed off the grass as the sun rose higher, and the wind changed its direction and rippled the brown grass blades in endless melancholy waves. With the changing wind, all traces of fire left the air again; but as far as the herd was concerned, the south had definitely been established as the region of man and fire.

Now that the smell of fire was gone, the herd was in

no great hurry. They continued their march leisurely, cropping grass as they went. Late in the afternoon they came upon another delightful hollow, the slopes of which were dotted with rosebushes and in the center of which was an elongated pond with barely a two foot rim of mud around it, and here they stopped with a universal sense of having arrived.

The barren plains which stretched away from this secluded hollow open and unobstructed in every direction, bore no trace of man or fire; the buffalo trails which led up the slopes from the water's edge faded out in infinity, their grass-overgrown sides giving them a sense of peace and security. A coyote den at the opposite end of the bowl and almost up to the rim of the hollow was the only evidence of life about the pond. The bowl itself was quite deep for prairie hollows, deep enough to shut away from those who were near the pond the barrenness of the prairies above. From there, too, the dome of the sky seemed to rest upon the rim of the hollow, giving the horses a feeling of protection and limitation, like a sort of fence against man's greedy intrusion.

Queen drank plenty of water at the ice hole, since her mother still had no milk for her, and since she was hungry too she grazed away till her sides were distended and her legs too weary to hold her up. Then, because her mother had been lying down all evening, she lay down close beside her, shutting her eyes in the joy of rest, not knowing that this night was shutting away forever the vague doorway behind which lay the never-to-be-forgotten period of her happy colthood.

Chapter Three

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

QUEEN AWOKE WITH the first peep of dawn. With her muzzle pressed against her mother's warm flank, she watched the unfolding of morning. Red streaks appeared above the southeastern horizon, tinting a mass of heavy clouds which were oozing up out of the north and moving with a quiet anger toward the center of the sky. The air was clear but sharply cold. The earth and all things on it were covered with a thick plating of frost. Every blade of grass and every stalk of dry weed were shining with luxuriant whiteness. The hairs of her mother's mane and the long ones at the end of her tail, far enough from the body's heat, were also tipped with frost. Queen turned to examine her own tail and seeing that it too was tipped with whiteness, licked it off; but her moving disturbed her mother, who protested sleepily, so she returned to her former position.

The cluttered forms of mares and colts, nearby and farther up the incline, all equally tipped with this wintry whiteness, lay in a scattered mass along the slope, separating slowly, as the morning light brightened, into individual bodies, some of whom had already distinguished

themselves in Queen's mind from the rest of the herd.

A short distance in front of her, beyond the backs of two of the mares, Queen picked out the black head of the mischievous colt, the tips of his black ears streaked with white frost. He was apparently still asleep, because he didn't move; although of course his ears flipped occasionally, as ears often did on horses and colts while they were asleep. She was watching him with some irritation, remembering that he had annoyed her, when she saw something move—directly above his ears and way off on the opposite slope of the bowl.

Queen watched this thing with a strange, instinctive sense of misgiving, and as the slopes came out clearer and clearer from the blurred vagueness of the lifting night, she saw that it was a coyote near his den. It seemed to her that the coyote was looking down upon the sleeping herd with great interest. She remembered having seen one of these beasts before, and recalled that her mother had become so nervous at sight of him that it had worried her. She watched him stretch lazily and sit down on his haunches a few yards nearer to the pond and the sleeping horses; in fear of him, she lowered her head again to her mother's flank, keeping her eyes focussed upon him.

Suddenly she saw another coyote, a few rods away from the first; and as she raised her head slightly to make sure, one of the horses in front of her got up and shook himself. Another one nearby got up, and while both of them trotted off to warm up, Queen lost sight of the coyotes. Other horses began stirring at various points, and soon a whole group of them was stampeding away around the inclining sides of the bowl in an effort to warm up.

The old buckskin mare, as was usual with her now, was one of the last to get up, with much groaning and grunting; immediately, but slowly, she started to limp toward the pond. Queen was glad to be up and stirring and she tripped around and around her mother to warm herself up.

As her blood began to circulate more rapidly, and her pleasure in motion grew greater, the tiny circle around her lumbering mother became too small for her needs. Forgetting about the coyotes, now that big horses were stirring all over the bowl, Queen started loping around the pond after two of the older horses who were apparently bent on making the circuit. She had gone only half-way along the lower side of the pond, however, when she became aware of the black colt racing after her.

She turned, and looking back at him, swerved to the side, sending out an urgent call for help to her mother. The old mare raised her head from the water hole, and called back with an angry threat, designed to warn the black colt.

But the old limping mare was too far away from him to worry the black colt. He continued chasing the little buckskin filly, an expression of mischievous glee all over his black head. As the two of them came around the pond directly in front of her, the old mare, painfully limping off from the ice hole, reached out at the passing colt and nipped him on the rump.

The black colt's white mother, who had been taking it all in, now rushed to *his* defense. Angered by what she had seen, the white mare attempted to nip the buckskin mare but backed off in time to escape being struck by one

of the buckskin's hind hoofs. The white mare turned around and replied in kind, neither hoofs being within three feet of striking.

All over the slopes heads raised and looked on, taking the suggestion of action as just the proper fun for the morning warming-up exercises. Hind legs kicked into the air harmlessly in a dozen different directions; and the younger horses and the older colts stampeded away around the slough, spreading out and scattering up the slopes, each group finding its corner to graze in, the bowl abruptly settling down to the peaceful pursuit of breakfast.

But Queen's mother acted disgruntled and unhappy, limping away from the rest of the mothers, grumbling as she limped, moving off painfully the moment Queen made the slightest attempt to help herself to milk. In her strangely complaining, limping way, she seemed to want to keep away from the rest of the mothers, making her way slowly up the slope to the rim of the hollow and away.

Queen tried her best to induce her mother to go back to where the other horses were grazing. She felt uncomfortable and lonely being off like that with her mother, and especially since her mother was so lame and unhappy. But the old mare only murmured to her reassuringly and continued grazing half-heartedly, limping farther and farther away from the rest.

Less than a quarter of a mile away there was another small and shallow hollow in the floor of the prairie, and there in the bottom of it was a small oval muddy spot where there had been a pond during the early period of

the summer. Down in there, the old mare seemed to be more contented; but late in the afternoon she lay down, and nothing "Queen could do could get her to stand up.

Queen had been so busy trying to get milk, trying to induce her mother to go back to the other horses, that she had done very little grazing; and now, being very hungry, she let her mother lie there and went off to crop grass in earnest.

Grazing off from her mother, Queen came to the mud spot where there were still a number of bunches of tall rushes standing dry and stiff. As she had moved around these rushes, grazing on the other side of the mud spot, she looked up one time and couldn't see her mother. The rushes were in the way. Frightened, Queen tore away around the mud spot and came breathlessly to her mother's side.

The old mare was dozing, her great head lowered, her old lips hanging in a peculiar baggy fashion from her yellow teeth. Queen was badly disturbed by something she could only feel. She scolded her mother, complained about her lying there and tried to nudge her to get up; but the pathetic groans and feeble little whinnies with which she answered, made Queen realize that her mother didn't want to get up or couldn't; and so, in despair, she finally lay down beside her and fell asleep.

She awoke with a start. It was very cold and Queen felt that she had been cold for some time. A gloomy heaviness hung in the air and the sky was now thick with threatening clouds. Suddenly, coming fully awake, she turned her head—her mother was not there.

Queen leaped to her feet with a frightened cry. She

was all alone in the deserted hollow. Her mother had gone off and left her. She was not only badly frightened, but angry at her mother and sorry for herself.

First Queen galloped to the rim of the hollow, in the direction of the other hollow and the rest of the herd; but when she got there and took one look across the barren flatness of the prairie, she turned and raced down the slope again. Her mother would never go away and leave her like that—she was sure of that!

In racing back down the little hollow slopes, she made out something dark in among the rushes and, frightened half to death though she was, afraid to go there to look, she instinctively had a horrible feeling that that was just where her mother was, that that dark shadowy mass among the dried rushes *was* her mother. She approached the rushes with the skin quivering all over her body, going very slowly, sniffing, and peering with large, frightened eyes.

Sure enough, there was her mother, right on the mud in among the rushes, flat on her side, her head stretched backward as far as it could go, her teeth exposed, a pool of blood on the ground below her nose. The feeling of relief which she had first felt on finding her mother, gave way at once to a new, blood-freezing fear of something mysterious and terrible.

In spite of all these strange and bewildering feelings, this was her mother lying there; and Queen couldn't get herself to go back to the other horses and leave her. She remained a few feet away, but kept looking at her anxiously, and time after time, without going any nearer, she called out to her impatiently.

The old mare made no answer. She didn't even grunt feebly, as she had done shortly before Queen had gone off to sleep. Nor did she move the least bit.

Queen raised her head and looked off to the top of the slope, in the direction of the big hollow where the rest of the herd was. None of the other horses were coming, as she hoped some of them would. She felt so dreadfully alone that she was becoming desperate. Finally, she tripped over to her mother and sniffed at her muzzle. The coagulated blood was horrible and she was taken with the impulse to run.

Darkness began lowering, and the wind swept up the incline with a moaning sadness. Queen reached hesitantly toward the white strip on her mother's forehead and nudged her, whinnying petulantly as she did so. But the cold, hard feel of that forehead was repulsive and arrestingly abnormal.

Queen sprang back, frightened, from the touch. She leaped away in the direction of the slope, but a few feet from the mud area stopped, and looked back again. She just could not leave her mother no matter how terrible her condition. It was all so bewildering. In desperation for something to do, she began to graze listlessly.

For sometime Queen grazed in this despondent way, stopping every few moments to look toward her mother, hoping to see a change in her prostrate position, but going back each time to her grazing. As she began to lose hope of seeing her mother on her feet again, the darkness slowly covered her up. Queen grew nervous and in her nervousness she began to see things off in the dark spaces, repeatedly seeing the coyotes whom she had seen that

morning, their slinking, shadowy forms eluding her frightened gaze as soon as she turned to look where she thought she had seen them.

Then, as she looked up to the rim of the hollow, across the mud area toward the east, she actually saw the shadow of one of the coyotes, cut clearly against the gray sky beyond him. There he sat looking down at her, and her mother could not help her. The two coyotes she had seen early that morning had shown evidences of being afraid of the horses about the pond.

Queen turned and raced with all her strength up the south slope, becoming more and more terrified as she ran; so desperately afraid that the coyote might be coming after her that she didn't even dare to look in his direction.

The sight of the many forms of the horses in the big, darkened hollow, spread around the pond and up the slopes, relieved her greatly. Queen disturbed them all with her unhappy and unrestrained whinnying. She could see through the darkness that one head had raised after another, but no mother came to comfort her or to give her milk, every head turning back again to its own business.

Queen slowed down, suppressing her desire to call out for help, and studied the different groups. The mares and their little colts had already lain down on the slope, this time on the north side of the pond, because the wind was coming from the north; and so she cautiously turned in their direction. As she came toward them, she looked hard through the darkness, hopeful of possibly finding her mother among them, and yet knowing paradoxically that she had left her in the little hollow. She whinnied ap-

pealingly in every direction, but got only curious looks in return as different heads turned at her approach.

Near the trail on which she had come down the slope, Queen made out the pointed ears of the black colt, so she quickened her walk and hurried over to the other side of the group. In moving around to the other side, she came near the water hole. The old sorrel work-horse was taking a drink, his clumsy body cut clearly against the background of the frozen surface of the pond, and Queen turned abruptly toward him.

The old sorrel was drawing up water with a noisy, drawn-out sipping through his badly worn teeth. Queen tripped up to him with a frightened, ingratiating whinny. The old work-horse looked backward without lifting his head, but he whinnied a tremulous welcome as he kept right on drinking.

Queen stepped up carefully, and lowering her little muzzle beside his big head, she drank with him—drank as if there had been a fire inside of her which she was trying to put out. When the sorrel raised his big, ungainly head and stepped back with his clumsy, heavy, feet, Queen immediately stopped drinking and hurried after him.

The old sorrel lumbered off to the side of the group of mares and their colts, and Queen clung to him tenaciously. When the old fellow found a likely spot to lie down on, he lowered himself to the ground with assurances of good-will and rheumatic groans. For many years he had toiled in the harness and his joints were stiff and his muscles inflamed. Queen stood beside him in the darkness, waiting for him to settle down; then, whinnying questioningly, she lay down near him.

First she lay down several feet away from him, because she was afraid of annoying him; then, when the icy blasts coming down the slope began digging through her fur, making her shiver, she began to whimper. Every time she whimpered, the old sorrel took the trouble to answer her; and his responses were so soft, so full of kindly assurances, that Queen got up and moved closer to him, lying down this time right in front of him.

She did this hesitatingly, whinnying ingratiatingly, each time she moved a little, yet holding herself ready to get up and walk off again if he appeared not to like it. But far from objecting to her nearness, he seemed to welcome the warmth which came from her; so Queen crept closer and closer, finally lowering her head right upon his side as she was in the habit of doing with her mother.

All through the early part of the long winter night, Queen lay there, thinking of her mother, seeing her lying prostrate on the mud area of the little hollow, waiting for daylight to return so that she could go back there and be near her again.

And when she finally did fall asleep, she slept in small snatches, constantly waking up and finding it still night. The old sorrel breathed very noisily as he slept, and it was snowing. Flakes were falling through the thick darkness, and a blanket of the cold whiteness was gathering all over her, gathering so fast and in such floods that she was afraid it would completely cover her.

The wind was howling, and great showers of snow kept sweeping down the incline upon them, completely covering the earth and obliterating the world as Queen had known it up to now.

Chapter Four

FINDING A MOTHER

IT HAD BEEN a dreadful night, the worst night Queen had ever known. Only fear, fear of the wind and snow, fear of coyotes, fear of the thick darkness beyond the small living circle of the sleeping herd, kept her from getting up and running, running anywhere, everywhere over the plains in search of her mother.

When the long-delayed dawn began breaking through the wind-blown, snow packed hollow, it was a new world Queen's dilated eyes looked upon, as new as her world must have looked to her the day she was born.

It was a very white world and a cold and unfriendly one. The horses of the herd were all dozing in huge unrecognizable lumps, shapeless under cover of the snow. As she looked, puzzled, bewildered and afraid, as far as her eyes could see without moving her head, Queen saw a snow encrusted ear flip here and there. This slight evidence of life on their part convinced Queen that they were not stiff and cold and immovable as her mother had been, and she was grateful for the warmth which was coming from the old sorrel's side, under her lip.

What little snow Queen had seen falling in the early

autumn, like the frost which was on the grass each morning, had before vanished with the rising of the sun. Although the snow which now lay all around and upon her was frighteningly deep, she still expected that it would melt away when the sun was high at midday; yet something in the amazing extent of the snow, its roundness, its fluffiness, and its unbroken whiteness, made her realize that this was different from anything she had ever experienced before.

The dawn grew slowly brighter. The rim of the hollow came out of the twilight against the darker gray of the clouded sky like the top of a huge white china bowl. The grass, the stones, the coyote den—everything Queen had seen on those slopes the day before—had vanished. Her own feet and part of her body were out of sight. Daylight making this clear to Queen, she looked down where she knew her feet to be. She seemed quite amazed and puzzled for a few moments; then with a sudden impulse she moved her hind legs.

The snow blanket all over her body broke into pieces. The coldness came down to her skin and made her uncomfortable and she stood up. A young horse in the near distance also stood up at the same time, and shaking himself violently, sent a shower of snow into space all around him. Queen shook herself in the same way.

The old sorrel who had shaken the snow from his head, closed his eyes for a moment as the snow from Queen's shaking struck him on the head. But he merely murmured good-naturedly and, with his usual groaning, stretched his legs forward and laboriously stood up, re-

turning the compliment by shaking the snow from his body all over Queen.

The old sorrel then took a few steps forward, between two horses still lying down; biting into the snow, he began chewing it, shaking his head up and down as he did so. Queen watched him a moment, then she too took a bite of snow and began chewing it. It was very cold on her teeth, and so she began shaking her head up and down. She found that this seemed to help her teeth bear the coldness. When the old sorrel lumbered away up the snow packed slope, Queen followed him, raising her head high every few moments as she struggled through the drifts, so that she could look off in every direction for some possible sign of her mother.

One by one the rest of the horses got up out of the snow, shaking themselves as they stood up, throwing clouds of white snow into the air, and spreading out over the slopes of the hollow. When the old sorrel stopped and began pawing the snow, Queen watched him with interest, noting through the sides of her eyes that all the rest of the horses in sight were doing the same.

When the old sorrel's clumsy hoof had cleared a hole in the snow, exposing the brown grass underneath, he lowered his ungainly head and with a tremolo of goodwill, his baggy lips seized a bunch of the grass and tore it from the earth with a quick, nervous jerk. Then lifting his head, he shook it up and down again, murmuring softly to Queen as he chewed. Queen carefully reached down beside him and gathered in a small bunch of snow-packed grass.

The old sorrel work-horse did not protest. Merely

pawing the hole wider, he went on about his business peacefully, as if Queen were not there at all sharing the fruits of his labor. Each time he raised his head to chew what he had cropped, Queen lowered hers and helped herself to whatever grass was exposed. Since the old sorrel did not protest, Queen continued to breakfast beside him, as if her doing so were a necessary part of his business of grazing.

She was managing to get her breakfast, but it was not the happiest breakfast she had ever had. Discontent seized her every other moment. Raising her head and looking away toward the spot in the rim of the hollow where she felt she would have to go to reach the little hollow where she had last seen her mother, she would shatter the still cold air of the slough with her futile calls. Everywhere heads would go up high and eyes would peer across the whiteness toward her, and sometimes cheerful little whinneys would come from somewhere in answer to her. Almost always it appeared to be the black colt who answered her, and always when he did, Queen would walk around to the other side of the sorrel so that he could not see her.

Queen followed the old sorrel all day long; grazing with him where he pawed the snow away; but in doing so she made every possible effort to induce the old fellow to take the direction of the spot on the rim, where she wanted to go looking for her mother but where she was afraid to go alone. She would get in front of him, get in his way as he pawed. He would look up at her in bewilderment and murmur with his inexhaustible good-will

and to appease her would turn to the side as she expected him to.

So slow was this process of getting him to understand, that it was early dusk before the two of them had worked their way to the spot on the rim from which, Queen knew, it was but a short distance across the flats to the little hollow where her mother was.

Then quite abruptly, looking down into the hollow and seeing a group of horses at the water hole at the end of the pond, the sorrel stepped out of the wide hole he had pawed and started lumbering down the slope.

Queen called to him, pleading with him. He answered her softly and unexcitedly, but he continued lumbering down like a clumsy tractor; and Queen, afraid to be alone, could only go plowing through the deeps after him. The old fellow remained near the pond after his drink, and when darkness settled down again upon the short winter day, he found himself a good place to lie down and Queen gratefully settled herself beside him once more.

Next day Queen continued again her frantic efforts to move the old fellow in the direction of the little hollow. The sorrel found it hard to understand her. He was puzzled by the way she got in his way, and looking at her as he chewed he would murmur to her in a quiet, kindly, but questioning way. He liked her warmth beside him in the cold night and was vaguely flattered by her constant attentions, but he knew nothing about colts and their restlessness; her constant, plaintive calling disturbed him strangely.

Failing to get him to go where she wanted, Queen be-

gan losing patience in her efforts to direct him. Sometimes as she stood near him, chewing the grass he pawed out, staring off across the flat space between the two hollows, she was taken by a strong impulse to go off by herself. The desire to find her mother, to get some of the milk she hungered for, to get back into the old happy security of her mother's side, began growing into an obsession within her, a passion which could overcome her fear of the empty spaces and her instinctive terror of coyotes.

This obsession reached its highest peak of intensity just as evening was approaching and flakes again began falling lazily through the gray twilight. Calling shrilly from the very depths of her being, Queen struck away impulsively across the flats.

The snows were deep and Queen was worried by the struggle she was obliged to make to get her thin legs out of the snow, but her obsession had shut out all ordinary impulses and she plodded on, calling as she plowed through the snows, her sides growing wet with perspiration in spite of the increasing coldness of the approaching night.

She made the rim of the little hollow, but the light was fading rapidly when she got there and, to her horror when her gleaming eyes actually looked down into the hollow, she saw coyotes moving around a dark spot at the very bottom of the bowl. Queen stopped dead in her tracks, but one of the coyotes saw her. Sitting down on his haunches, he lifted his ugly muzzle and shattered the darkening prairie air with his blood-curdling *yap-yap-yurrr*.

That was more than Queen could endure. Shrinking fearfully back so as to be unseen, she slowly turned and began leaping like a deer in the direction of the big hollow and the old sorrel work-horse. For some three hundred yards she hopped in and out of the deep snow, afraid to stop for fear that the coyotes would come after her; then, completely out of breath, sunk up to her flanks, she helplessly gave way to the snow and remained motionless for several minutes.

In her befuddled head, the fast lowering darkness behind her was filled with coyotes coming after her; and the moment she had regained her breath, she turned to look back.

It was snowing now very heavily, and though Queen couldn't see any coyotes, she was still as badly afraid as ever. Keeping a sharp lookout in the direction from which she had come, she began struggling again, turning sideways without knowing it.

On leaving the sorrel and the big hollow, Queen had called out. Now, however, she was afraid to call for fear the coyotes would hear her. But after some fifteen minutes or so of wandering blindly over the deep snows and through an atmosphere that was thick with falling flakes, she got the feeling that she should have reached the hollow. She was up to her belly in snow and her wet flanks were freezing.

Forgetting now about the coyotes, she let out a cry for help, hoping to reach the ears of the friendly old sorrel. Her cry frightened her, but her fear of the night, the storm and being alone overcame that fear, and she cried out again even louder than before.

Suddenly, as she stopped to regain the breath that the rising blast had taken away from her, she heard a soft muffled whinny from the snowy darkness behind her. She turned laboriously around and, calling again, beat her way in the direction of the whinny she had heard. When she stopped she heard it again, this time very much nearer.

But it was not the voice of the old sorrel; and now, worried about who it might be, Queen did not respond. Peering blindly through the darkness, she tried to sniff against the snow-laden wind. Suddenly a warm little muzzle like her own touched her nose.

Had it not been for the deep snows and her own exhaustion, Queen would have turned and fled, crying to high heaven. It was the black colt, who had apparently been following her ever since she had left the old sorrel and impulsively let herself go across the snows.

But he was so glad to get to her, to find someone to be near, that his anxious whinnies completely disarmed her. Not only was he friendly, but he was as exhausted as she was and just as much afraid.

Tired as he was, he stamped around her, beating down the snow, sniffing happily at her muzzle, her mane, and along her back, trying to get close to her and the warmth of her body.

While the wind poured showers of snow into the hole as fast as they stamped it away from between them, they soon got very close together and putting their heads over each other's backs, kept moving to avoid the wind until they found the most comfortable position. There they stood as the wind piled the drifts of snow around them.

Grateful to have found each other, they made no attempt to look for the hollow and the other horses. When they got tired of standing; they lowered themselves to their sides, off their feet. With her head over the black colt's short, stubby withers, his head over her mane, they spent the entire night, the blizzard magnanimously covering them with a warm blanket of snow.

When daylight came at last, the wind had died down. The blanket of snow which had covered them was stretched spotlessly over all the vast prairie. The black colt was the first to break out from under it and, as soon as the cold swept down upon her, Queen jumped up with him.

The black colt seemed to know where he was going and Queen, who had always fled at sight of him, now struggled anxiously after him in his snowy wake.

They had gone no more than a few yards when they heard the frantic call of the black colt's white mother. The black colt answered at once with a loud blast which came out of the very middle of his round black body.

As they called they beat the deep snows, looking here and there; suddenly the grayish whiteness of the white mare's head seemed to lift out of the snows a few feet ahead. As soon as she spied her colt, the white mare came leaping toward him, the snow rising in clouds from both sides of her. When she reached him at last, she caressed him from head to foot, running her hot quivering lips along his forehead and down his back.

While the black colt was happy to see her and her caresses thrilled him, he was now hungry. Impatiently he whirled from her excited attentions to get his breakfast.

As he slipped from under her muzzle and beat his way around to get his milk, the white mare discovered Queen right behind him. In her gladness at having found her colt, she began caressing the little buckskin too.

Queen was surprised and very happy to get such affection. It was almost like having found her own mother. The more she whinnied with pleasure, the more the good white mare showered her affection upon her. Queen switched her little tail excitedly and danced around the big mare, finally sliding along her other side and reaching hungrily along her flanks.

The black colt on one side, Queen on the other, their noses touching, they greedily sucked the warm milk, neither the black colt nor the white mare making the slightest protest.

A great and warming gladness poured into Queen with the milk she drew. When the big mare felt that they had had enough, she abruptly started plowing her way back to the hollow where the rest of the herd was busy struggling for grass. Queen and the black colt plowed along behind her, side by side.

All day long, when the white mare grazed, they grazed beside her, racing around her in play when they needed exercise, drinking together at the water hole, and sleeping together at night.

Chapter Five

MAN AGAIN!

THE WINTER WAS a hard one. The skies were overcast and dark for weeks at a time. A few moments of sunshine were invariably followed by days of howling winds and snow. Blizzard succeeded blizzard and the hollows were so full of drifts that moving about was difficult and discouraging. Only when the grass they had been able to uncover in the well-beaten hollow gave out, did the herd venture to look for better pastures under the prairie ocean of snow.

During the short winter daytime, the work-horses and the mares and their colts, in groups of their own, searched for feed on the snow-covered plains above, but in the evenings they always beat their way back to the hollow where they kept the water hole open. As the blizzards piled the snows down into the hollow, the herd rested close together on the north slope not far from the water hole; this nightly tramping down of the snow raised a wall of snow north of them which shielded them slightly from the regular northern blasts.

Night after night, when the winds shrieked overhead, pouring down shower after shower of dry snow upon

them, Queen lay close to the black colt and his white mother, sometimes between them, in an ecstasy of gratitude for their warmth and their protection.

Those winter nights were painfully long. The sun rose and set so far to the south, and the arc it made in its daily course was so small, that a drink or two of her share of the black colt's milk and the task of uncovering enough grass for a single meal consumed Queen's day. When the shadows of one night, driven out by the dawn, came back so soon in the next night and there was nothing to do but sleep, sleeping became tiresome and the necessity of shifting from side to side because of weariness or against the wind kept Queen awake. In those periods of wakefulness, the impressions made most deeply on her mind rekindled like embers in the windblown ashes of a fire and glowed like experiences renewed. Out of these impressions, out of this experience relived, Queen acquired her individuality, her wisdom and her cunning.

Often the phantom form of the old buckskin mare came to haunt her nights and she lived over again the activities of the day in her dreams. Always on the following days she pawed the snow less energetically, stopping often to gaze wistfully away over the endless snows, puzzled by the incongruity of her mother's return in the dark hours and her failure to come in the daytime when she would be able to see and enjoy her more clearly.

She was comfortable and very happy in the protective relationship of the white mare and her black colt; yet these persistent dreams in the long winter nights, haunting in turn her wakeful hours, left upon her beautiful

head subtle marks of a vague sorrow, adding a charm to her head which she never lost.

Then the days began to lengthen. The sun climbed higher into the sky and broke through the winter clouds with a stimulating warmth. Spring came upon the sluggishness of winter as a rosy dawn breaks upon a gloomy night. The white-packed hollows began smiling up to cloudless skies with a silent and radiating wetness, and the snows which shrank away perceptibly exposed wider and wider areas of bare earth. The softening earth began emitting intoxicating odors of growth and the low places filled with cool, trembling pools.

Birds appeared daily in greater and greater numbers, putting life and music into the barrenness of the prairies. Before the snows had completely vanished, a layer of delicious green grass began carpeting the earth and thousands of little crocuses dotted the slopes with starlike splotches of color.

Longer and longer though the days were becoming, the colts found them all too short for the full expression of the desire for activity which spring had brought. Through the cool moonlit nights, early in the lavender dawn, all through the cooler mornings, they romped and chased each other over the prairies, cropping grass in between times and dozing in the hotter afternoons. The least break forth of one of them, the swiftly moving shadow of a hawk, the roll of a thistle or the bursting hop of a jack rabbit, anything that moved or suggested motion, set them racing in wide circles, plunging through sloughs, splashing through pools and ponds, jumping, kicking at the air, or pretending to bite each other.

Changes met them wherever they looked. The earth they romped upon changed under their very feet. Just as each day was in itself a succession of changes, the white light of day merging into the colors of evening, fading out completely in night only to break again into the color and brightness of dawn, so each day was different from the day before; and so, without their being aware of it, they themselves changed with each passing day.

Queen was only vaguely conscious of this changing in herself and in her companions, but one change was decidedly clear to her. And being most easily perceptible, this change in a way represented them all. It was the change which she one day realized was taking place in the black colt. Something was happening to him, very distinctly. His black hair was rapidly falling out. This was not so unusual because they were all shedding, but the black colt was steadily growing less black and beginning to turn white like his mother.

This queer, subtle change was at times disturbing to her. Sometimes when he was a short distance from her, she would think he was some other colt; yet at the same time she knew that it was he, for there were many other characteristics in him which remained his, even at a distance, unchangeable and unmistakable.

In time, of course, she got quite used to the change in his appearance, but she never completely forgot that he had been black. The image of him, the picture that arose in her mind when she thought of him, when he was not immediately before her, was a changeable image which was black one moment and white the next.

If Queen had been in the habit of applying to every image in her mind some name, she would have called him, "White-black." Possibly she might have added the idea, "big," for he was much bigger than he had been. That quality, however, applied to all the colts and so it was not quite as obtrusive. By the varying degrees of this and other qualities and characteristics in the different colts, Queen knew one from the other.

Throughout that first long winter, her companionship had been somewhat restricted to the black colt and his white mother; but now the common desires of youth brought all the colts together and led them, in time, to abandon the companionship of the mares and adult horses. Some of them still went back occasionally to their mothers for milk, many of them to be rudely rebuffed, but most of them had already been weaned by their mothers, by time, and by circumstance. All of them began valuing the companionship of their own generation, those who felt the same urges and had the same energies to respond to them; and because they played together, chased over the prairies together, they remained together at resting time.

Their mothers, on the other hand, although still manifesting a strong interest in their colts, shrank from the boisterous activity of the colt group and showed decided inclination to enjoy the slower, more peaceful movements of their own groups.

In spite of this cleavage, in spite of this decided division of interests and inclinations, the various groups lived and played and fed close to each other without quarrel.

or dissension—and at the first sign of danger, they gathered into a unit and fled in concert.

The old desire for her mother, the impulse to go out and look for her, had given Queen a blind urge to be constantly on the move. This urge would well up spasmodically, oftentimes sending her loping wildly across the plains without reason or purpose. Always as soon as he saw her start away like that, White-black loped after her, and generally the rest of the colts followed them. Sometimes the older horses would join them, mistaking the escapade for a flight from danger; then the entire herd would go racing pell-mell over the prairie. If this wild goose chase happened to lead them to the discovery of a slough with better grass and water, they adopted it for their new camping ground and remained there till an even better one was found.

But this breaking forth into a purposeless chase over the plains began taking place daily and sometimes several times a day. Just as the rest of the herd acquired the habit of following her, Queen became conscious of her leadership and of her intense desire to lead.

When a big brown colt took over the race, one morning, reaching out slightly ahead of Queen, she filled up with a jealous concern which blazed out of her large round eyes. For several minutes she strained and struggled breathlessly to retake the lead from him; but when she found herself unable even to get abreast of him, she swerved sharply to the left. She was almost exhausted and had merely intended to fall out and get out of the way of the rest of the herd behind her; but White-black,

at her side, immediately veered with her, and the entire herd, all but the brown colt, turned with him.

As soon as Queen became aware of the victory she had unexpectedly gained, she got her second wind and leaped forward again with renewed strength. The entire herd went racing madly to the left behind Queen, and the big brown colt found himself off in space, alone, something no horse can endure. He turned at once and followed them anxiously. And Queen was by no means unconscious of the trick she had in this unexpected way stumbled upon. Thereafter she practiced it without the slightest compunction.

At this time of the year, their food grew in abundance wherever they turned. The grass was rich and juicy. Wild plants, sweet and fragrant, grew profusely on the hillslopes, and water, cool and refreshing, rippled in every hollow.

With plenty to eat and a great deal of exercise, Queen grew stronger daily and visibly filled out. Too active to be fat, she became attractively plump. Her hair was now shorter and very sleek—its gloss flashed in the sunlight. Her black mane was luxuriantly thick and wavy, part of it coming down between her ears and over the white spot on her forehead, down to her eyes, giving her magnificent head with its imprint of sadness an unmistakable touch of queenliness. The colts of the herd, all about her, unmistakably rendered her homage.

White-black; strong and good-natured, kept them all at a safe distance; but the more aggressive young stallions availed themselves of every chance to touch her, to graze where she was grazing, or to run nearest to her when

they were racing. Whenever White-black resented the attention any big fellow appeared to be paying her, he would turn upon him, neigh threateningly and bite or pretend to bite him. Sometimes there would be a similar response of force, a show of anger, ears going back, teeth exposed, or hind legs kicking viciously into the air, each belligerent going off with an air as if he had won the fight; yet more and more it became an accepted fact that White-black had claims upon Queen which were indisputable. Queen liked them all, but it was evident that she liked White-black best; and most of the quarrels ended in White-black's victory because of Queen's attitude rather than his own strength.

Next to White-black, Queen favored the white mare; and next to her, the old sorrel work-horse. White-black appreciated her love for his mother, which he shared, but he could not understand her predilection for the old sorrel. For some time, when the old work-horse, out of pure reminiscent fondness, approached Queen, White-black would lose his temper, kick at the old horse and even attempt to bite him. Whereas Queen sometimes allowed the colts to fight it out between themselves, she always reprimanded him for any incivility to the old sorrel and soon White-black learned to let him alone.

The lazy lull of summer heat began to creep into the long days, and mosquitoes and nose-flies came to blight the happy contentment of the herd. The mosquitoes, annoying as these little pests could be, were not half so bad as were the cruel nose-flies, the very sound of whose buzzing near their chins would drive the colts frantic. Grazing quietly, they would hear one of these murderous

little insects flying around their heads, and expecting the burning sting of their poisonous beaks on the tender skin of nose or chin, they would attempt to prevent their landing by bobbing their heads up and down violently. Failing in this, they would break out on a run and race away in a circle a quarter of a mile or more long.

This vicious little parasite generally attacked its victim by buzzing around his muzzle, like a bee; then, landing quietly on the animal's chest, it would creep up along the neck to the chin and then the nose.

When the nose-flies first appeared, the older horses, having had a good deal of experience with them, would keep their noses deep in the grass as they cropped and chewed it, or, when through grazing, they would gather in groups and rest their chins on one another's backs, so as to prevent their creeping up from back of their chins. At the same time they would keep their big tails switching to drive them off when they approached.

In time the colts learned to protect themselves in the same way. They would stand like that by the hour, in the heat of the afternoon; when the sultry spells were broken by gusts of prairie wind, which carried the pests away, they gave themselves over to eating and drinking and merrymaking.

There came a sultry spell in the early days of summer. Every chin was resting upon some friendly back. Tails were switching ceaselessly and feet were stamping the ground with drowsy rhythm. The air was still. Not a blade of grass moved. The silence was broken only by the threatening singsong of mosquitoes, the "alarming

drone of nose-flies, or the occasional snort of a muzzle in an effort to blow them away.

Suddenly there came into the still air, the telltale tattoo of distant hoofbeats. Two horsemen, coming over a ridge to the south, were just in the act of separating, with the obvious intention of coming together again on the north side of the herd, when Queen discovered them.

With a shrill whinny of alarm, she leaped away to the north. The herd at first scattered by her cry of alarm, gathered in time at her heels, before the two horsemen, one on each side of them, had been able to reach out ahead of them.

For almost an hour, the herd and the two horsemen on either side kept abreast of each other, Queen and the younger colts just slightly in the lead. The older horses and mares, wearying of the strenuous race, began falling back. Queen and the colts, snorting as they went, their tails arched in contempt, their legs fully developed and their vigor high, continued galloping at top speed, tearing down into the silent hollows and racing up the hills and ridges, leaping easily over stones and badger holes, steadily increasing the lead they had over the horsemen.

This was the first time since Queen and her buckskin mother had set out upon the long flight from the ranch yard that man on horseback had intruded himself into her happy life. This flashing view of him, bringing up unhappy experiences, seemed to connect itself with all that had been fearful and painful in her life.

Time after time Queen stopped for a moment on the hilltops to look back, the colts right behind her. While

she no longer saw the horsemen, the fact that the older horses and mares too were no longer in sight convinced her that the men had captured them, and convinced her further that even though the men were not in sight, they were still a menace to flee from. She would look back, call out to the lost portion of the herd, then turn as nervously as if the horsemen were actually in sight and race northward for dear life.

The farther they ran, the more thirsty they became. Some of the colts slowed down as their fear of the unseen horsemen gave way to the desire to drink. The anxious flight dropped into a steady trot and an eager scanning of the distances ahead for the welcome shadows of sloughs and the thrilling gleam of sky-reflecting water.

Evening lowered slowly. They were getting very tired and hungry, but they were so thirsty that they would not stop for rest or grass. Behind them now lay some fifteen miles of prairie in all the length of which there had been no sign of water, so they realized that if they were to find water it would have to be by going on ahead.

They came at dusk to an elongated slough, the oval bottom of which was under a dark blue lake; one side was green with tall rushes and brown-cattails, the dank smell of mud and juicy green grass filling the air.

The slope down to that pond was half a mile long, but the moment they spied the water from the hilltop they tore down the incline as if they hadn't been galloping all day long.

Here around the soft, muddy shores they spent the night, drinking and grazing and rolling over in the mud.

The next morning, when they went at their grazing, they moved up the north slope and continually raised their heads high to sniff the south air for traces of the old horses and the mares or for danger signs of any further approaches of horsemen.

In their cautiousness they grazed on the highest point above the slough all morning, but they saw nothing on the open plains as far as they could look, not even a coyote.

In the heat of the afternoon, however, as they were standing halfway up the north slope of the slough hollow, their chins on one another's backs, they were surprised by the slow, bedraggled arrival of two of the colts and an old mare who, even though they had fallen back in the flight, had somehow evaded the horsemen.

At first Queen tore up to the very top of the slope, but she soon realized that the three stragglers were alone and not pursued by the men, and, overcome by curiosity, they trotted down again to sniff at them as they drank at the pond.

The white mare was not with them and they were so tired and thirsty that they were annoyed by the effort of the colts to sniff noses with them.

When they had finished drinking, the rest of the colts surrounding them in a semi-circle, they showed no inclination to rest or linger down in the hollow, despite the luscious grass abounding near the water. Their heads bobbing seriously, their muzzles dripping back into the pond half the water they drank, they raised their heads high and nervously, and trotting around the pond to the north slope, went steadily up and away.

Catching from them their fear of the horsemen, Queen led the band on; for more than a week they continued this nervous migration, grazing and resting when necessary, but constantly guarding the southern horizon and continuously travelling northward.

Chapter Six

THE TRAGEDY OF THE WHITE MARE

WHEN THE HERD came to another hollow with another shimmering pond, they settled down for the summer. There was a mass of tall green rushes growing halfway across the blue water and these were liberally spattered with cattails. The shore was wide and muddy, but most of the mud had dried hard and a huge boulder at one end of the bowl seemed to add to the air of seclusion which hung over it.

Nevertheless, during the first few days after they had settled down there, they kept to high places along the north rim and guarded carefully the vast flat approaches of prairie along the south. Then as the hot, enervating summer days dragged along, not a living thing appearing anywhere to disturb them, they began resting in the heat of the day in the shadow of the boulder near which the dankness of the water gave them a sense of coolness.

Again the heat brought back the mosquitoes and the nose-flies and once more the colts took to standing in

pairs, their chins on each other's backs, dozing the afternoon hours away, their tails switching mechanically.

There came a season of steady rain which lasted several weeks. The constant dripping from the heavens was disagreeable, but the grass became greener and more juicy and the pestiferous nose-flies disappeared. The rainy season passed and frosts came night after night, and soon the mosquitoes and the flies also disappeared. The exhilarating days of autumn were at hand, cool, clear and sunny. The peaceful nights gleamed with stars and scintillated with the swishing northern lights. Life became again a continuous festival undisturbed and unhampered by man or insect—grass and water in abundance.

They were startled one autumn evening, shortly after dark, by the sound of hoofbeats. Queen and White-black were standing close to the big boulder when the hoofbeats came to them on the early night air. It sounded like horses beating along doggedly and laboriously; while Queen was not badly frightened, she immediately led the herd up to the rim along the north side of the bowl. When they got there and turned around, they made out four horse-forms coming along in single file and, though the darkness was quite heavy, Queen was sure that there were no men with them.

Queen waited up there, ready to flee, until the four bedraggled and obviously weary creatures had beat their way down to the water; then, seeing their forms clearly against the sky-reflecting ice, certain now that there were no men with them, she started down again, calling to them as she went and cautiously watching them through the darkness.

Whether they were too weary or too ill-natured, the fact that they did not answer made Queen suspicious; but she trotted down to the shore, looked at them across the narrow strip of ice-covered water, then trotted around toward them.

When Queen and the colts were about a hundred feet away from them, all four of them backed away from the hole in the ice, but instead of turning in a friendly way to sniff noses with the colts, they walked off in the opposite direction toward the other side of the pond.

The colts leaped forward in a trot after them, but kept cautiously to the side of them. When Queen had reached out ahead of the ugly, heavy walking leader of the four, they all stopped in their tracks, and Queen saw against the background of ice that the leader's ears were laid back. At the same time he neighed impatiently and threateningly.

The curious colts also stopped and looked at them from the distance. When the colts stopped, the four strangers started off again. Queen remained standing and watched them go. The last one was a white mare who limped very badly. Queen became very much interested in her because she was a white mare and trotted up to sniff at her, but the old mare neighed fearfully and hurriedly limped out of reach.

Queen found it hard to understand their behavior, and she stood there and watched them being swallowed up by the darkness. Had it not been for a disagreeable smell of barn and man about the four, she would have trotted after them and tried again to examine the white mare. While she stood there she saw White-black also

try to sniff at the old mare and she saw her limp away from him in fear.

When White-black turned back to Queen, they went off again to the boulder where they were in the habit of spending their nights, and as Queen looked back from time to time, she saw the shadowy figures of the four ill-natured horses going off their way along the pond.

In the morning they found two of the four lying down on the slope across the pond and the other two grazing. They made no attempt to go to visit with them until, when the sun was high and it became warm enough for all to want another drink, they met at the water hole in the ice.

The fellow who was always in the lead was a red, ugly-faced horse who simply did not want to be friendly with anybody. He took his drink, laid back his ears and neighed snarlingly, then walked off as everyone stepped out of his way. There was a black old jade and a bay-colored saddle pony with a large open sore on his withers, but Queen and White-black were interested mainly in the white mare. One of her hind legs was swollen so badly that it made her look like some other kind of animal; she was apparently so desperately afraid that the leg would be hurt that she wouldn't let any one get within yards of her.

All that morning and most of the afternoon both White-black and Queen tried over and over again to get near enough to sniff noses with her, but she would not let them. The moment she saw them coming, she would start limping away and neighing fearfully. But toward early evening—it was a very windy evening—they ap-

proached her where she was lying down and dozing; and while she was struggling painfully to her feet with a cry White-black bent over and touched her nose. She appeared to feel better after that, and when both Queen and White-black fussed over her affectionately she seemed happy and affectionate in turn; but she was very nervous about her swollen leg and constantly backed out of the way as soon as any one moved too near.

When the herd moved off to graze, the four strangers made no effort to go off by themselves; the white mare grazed at the outer edge of the herd, with White-black on one side and Queen on the other; and when the mare wearied and lay down in a little indentation in the slope, Queen lay down on one side of her and White-black on the other.

Because they always gathered about Queen when they went to sleep, the rest of the herd came to join them. In the middle of the resting part of the night, they were startled by a cry from the white mare. Queen jumped up in time to get out of the way of the black jade. Used to barns, thin-blooded, his ribs protruding, the old fellow was unable to keep warm, and was shambling about looking for some protection from the penetrating wind. In his clumsy way he had stepped on the white mare's swollen leg, and all the rest of the night the white mare groaned with pain and discomfort.

Most of the next day the old mare continued lying there, without grazing or going for water; then in the afternoon, when Queen suddenly thought of her and looked for her, she was gone. Throughout the evening, as she grazed, Queen kept raising her head from the grass

and looking for her, but she did not see her. She noticed that White-black, too, was looking for the mare.

For several days they looked for her in that way, moving about as they grazed and going farther and farther from the hollow; then one day they found her in a small, shallow hollow near a pile of grass-overgrown rocks. She was lying on her side, and her body had been torn open by coyotes who had fed upon her the night before.

Most of the colts shied away at the sight, although they remained fairly close and looked on with morbid curiosity. White-black approached the mare timidly from one side, Queen from the other. Queen approached the side where her head lay flat and thrown back and, reaching cautiously and hesitatingly, she nudged the cold hard forehead with her muzzle and then sprang back. Somewhere before in the dim past of her short life Queen had had a similar experience and the repugnance of it came back to her in full force.

Turning, as if frightened, she galloped away over the prairie, the herd stampeding wildly behind her. The white mare had been captured by man, Queen knew that. She smelled of man and his barn. Her horrible death also was of man—his rope, his fence, and his fire. The arrival of the four strangers with the barn smells upon them had brought man all too near again.

Queen did not return to the hollow where they had been camping all summer. Driven by an urge which she only vaguely understood and anxious to get far from the horror of the white mare in the hollow, Queen resumed the migration which she had begun with her own mother.

The nights were now so cold and the frost in the

mornings so thick that they did not have to be as concerned about water as they had been in warmer weather. They moved forward slowly and steadily, in Queen's acquired faith in the safety of the north.

Not until they came within sight of a bluish strip of woodland on the northern horizon ahead of them did Queen suppress the urge to keep going. The strip of woodland gave them a feeling that they had come to the end of their prairie world. In a hollow, protected from the north blasts by a steep ridge, and containing a pond with enough water left in it to do for the winter, they settled down. Here they remained during the hardest part of the winter.

The winter passed like a night of quiet pleasure. Half-way up the slope of the ridge was a long heavy row of giant rosebushes which caught the bulk of the snows that drifted down from the top of the ridge, and close against it and against each other, they spent the long winter nights.

On sunny days they devoted as much time to chasing each other through the deepest drifts as they did pawing for grass; on the grass they could dig up, and with their everlasting chasing over the snows, they grew big and strong. Blood flowed rich and freely through their veins and the hair on their bodies was long and thick. No matter how violently the elements might rage, they had acquired the ability to cope with them. If they lost weight during the latter part of the winter, they quickly regained it feeding upon the new grass which came out green and thick and juicy in the first weeks of spring.

Discomforts occasioned by the unusually severe storms

which came tearing down from the arctic were, like the sorrows of the dead past, forgotten in the contrast of the happier days of spring, in chasing unhampered over uncovered plains, in eating and drinking, and in the added pleasures of love. Having first discovered in themselves preferences for members of the opposite sex, they began to see characteristics in their choices which raised them above all others and made their conquest a wellspring of sublime happiness.

There were, of course, petty quarrels now and then, since love does not come unaccompanied by the strife of possession and opposing interests; and nature is not always fair in her providence, or when she is provident, is so often disorderly. There were some disappointments, and the weak were helpless here, as the weak are helpless everywhere, and often were obliged to give way to the strong; but the tragedies that pursue love among greedy and ferocious animals never marred their happier relationships; and even the weaker ones of the herd found such love as was theirs at least partially requited. Life on the rim of love was so rich and nature was so lavish, most of the inescapable hurts healed rapidly.

To Queen and White-black life became a game in which even tiredness had its delight. Strong and healthy and beautiful, admired and respected by all the rest and followed in their every whim, they played through the uninterrupted carnival of laughing spring and smiling, drowsy summer.

When winter came again, they met it without concern, perfectly willing to wade again through deep snows, accepting the most violent lashes of wind and

blizzard as old unfrightening experiences, warming their hearts again in the anticipated joy of a succeeding spring, regarding life as an endlessly interesting cycle in which the greatest discomforts of blizzard and sorrow had their certain retribution in the spring and happiness that were sure to follow.

Chapter Seven

W.H.Y MAN AND COYOTE?

► SPRING CAME EARLY. The geese returned from the south. The autumn sadness in their honking had given way to the exultation of rebirth. The snows melted almost in a day. Hundreds of wild ducks populated the many sloughs in the hollows and filled the lovely evenings with the soft calling of their love-making. In the still nights, or as she lay through the resting periods which she now so strangely needed, Queen kept her ears pricked high to catch the last faint sound of every love call. All around her the air vibrated with some one form or another of these love calls.

White-black, still a playful colt, thrilled her with his presence and the touch of his quivering lips; but something satisfactorily promising was taking shape in the love of her being. She liked to half-close her eyes and as if in a doze float away on the waves of the strange emotions which she had begun to experience daily. Sometimes she felt these gripping sensations so strongly that she wanted none of the rest of the herd to break in upon them. At such times she would wander away by herself. White-black followed her about a great deal, and he tried to

arouse in her again her more active play spirit; but when he began to realize that he could not influence her as he used to, that she insisted on being alone, he ceased annoying her and watched her from the distance, half-annoyed, half-puzzled.

Queen lost a great deal of her former vigor and her interest in the activities of the herd, keeping to the outskirts of their circle and refusing to enter into their escapades. Keeping to the outer circle when they grazed, she would often stand and look after them when, in the exuberance of their spirits, they broke away on a wild gambol over the prairies. When they went off across the plains in search of better grass, Queen would go down into the hollow and graze peacefully around the pond. She grazed slowly and listlessly, constantly lifting her head as she chewed to listen to the croaking of the frogs, or to the strangely touching half-murmur, half-song of the ducks as they paddled about among the rushes in the delightful stillness of lowering night.

Often Queen would halt her shuffling gait, and with her nose down among the grass blades, watch the little sandpiper as he raced swiftly over the dry-mud shore and called out with a tinge of frenzy his sad and questioning *pee-weet*; or she would suddenly lift her head anxiously and look after a brown curlew flying by overhead, wondering what he wanted in his melancholy complaint. He would fly right over her, go screaming out his strangely unhappy wail, sail away over the pond and off to the horizon, but come back again and again and wail as if he wanted her to hear.

Subtle changes came over Queen which she herself

could hardly understand. Reared as she was on those plains and loving them, even the seclusion of the hollow, abandoned by the herd, ceased to be seclusion enough for her and she took to the strip of woodland along the horizon on the north.

The herd had moved in that direction in search of more abundant grass, but while they grazed in sight of the great wall of trees, they rarely ventured any distance in among the trees. Queen, from the first, penetrated the unfamiliar shadows as if driven by some force outside of herself. Wandering in past the first few trees, Queen began going in deeper and deeper every day, with an abnormal interest in the secluded and confining shadows of the trees and the cover afforded by the clumps of bushes under some of them. Sometimes the very enclosure she looked for frightened her and she would go hastily tripping back to the open prairies, only to feel herself lured back into them even deeper than before.

To White-black she was a constantly growing puzzle. Yielding to her desire to be alone and interesting himself in other companions, he nevertheless kept an eye on her.

There came a period in which White-black missed her altogether. Day after day he went looking for her, shyly and self-consciously, afraid of annoying her by breaking into her retreat and yet too anxious about her not to go looking for her.

Then, one day, he found her deep in the woods, on an open grassy spot, on the side of a longish narrow pool of water, shut away from sight by clumps of bushes. She was caressing a small black colt that was trying very hard to stand on its long, shaky legs, when White-black broke

past the end of the bushes and stopped to stare in utter bewilderment.

He was so glad to see her that he began to whinny excitedly and to caper about along the edge of the pool. Then, wading across the water, he ran toward her.

Queen sprang between him and her baby with an angry neigh, ears down, eyes glowing and lips curling threateningly.

White-black stopped a few paces from her and whinnied placatingly; but she threatened him again whenever he took another step in her direction. He looked at her, puzzled and hurt, for several minutes. Then he lowered his head and pretended to be interested in the extraordinarily green grass along the edge of the pool. Several times he tried again to move toward Queen, whinnying softly and most ingratiatingly, but her hostile attitude was stubborn. At last, discouraged, he walked into the strip of water, took a cool drink, looked back a moment, and left her.

For several days, Queen kept to herself in her own little pasture in the woods. She knew just where the herd was at all times, for she watched them anxiously to make sure that they were not going too far away from her. Her foal grew stronger every day, spending most of his time learning to use his awkward legs by following his mother about as she grazed. And as he began to appear to be getting control of those legs, Queen began thinking more and more of the herd, watching them through the trees, going more and more out into the open.

She came through the wall of poplars to look for the herd on her colt's tenth day, and as she neared the point

where she would be able to look across the plains, she heard the far-away patter of hoofs.

She nudged her colt anxiously back farther into the woods; yet, curious and worried, she kept trotting back toward the open spaces to look again from time to time; and then, venturing out beyond all the trees, she caught sight of the herd just as it dropped out of sight, beyond a wide ridge in the east, three men on horses going over the hump after them.

Queen plunged back into the confining shadows of the woodland strip and splashed across the pool. So worried had she been as she splashed through the water, that she had failed to notice that the colt would not follow her. When she looked back, she saw him standing at the edge of the pool calling to her frenziedly. Queen at once turned back to him, and running her tremulous muzzle down his mane and along his back, led him around the pool to the little glade on the other side of the bushes; and there, like the indulgent mother she was, she caressed him affectionately as he helped himself to her milk.

For several weeks Queen lived in the woods like a deer, going out into the open only in the evening and during the night, looking anxiously for the herd and often shattering the prairie silence with her impassioned calling to her companions. But she clung to the protection of her woodland glade, because she knew that her baby could not possibly follow her fast enough on the plains should the men on horseback surprise her while she was with him.

Then as the days went by without any men appearing on the prairies again, Queen began staying out on the

open, near the woods, moving all along the side of the strip of woodland and searching the plains for signs of the herd.

By middle summer her colt was strong enough to gallop along with her and her hunger for her companions became too intense to endure. Queen began straying farther and farther from the woodland, loping along from hollow to hollow, rending the prairie silences with her calls to White-black and the rest of her companions.

Her intense loneliness revived the interest she had acquired in the small creatures of the plains, and watching them and having them around made her slightly less lonely. Sometimes she would go far out of her way to be near them.

She came upon a mother duck, one day, who was waddling down an old buffalo trail with a brood of little ducklings, only a few yards ahead of her on her way to the pond.

The mother duck was not afraid of horses, but she became nervous because her little ones were in the pathway and began calling to them to hurry them down to the water, turning her head from side to side as she waddled on. Queen slackened her pace and the black colt, sliding along her side, peered with large eyes at the little things racing along on their tiny legs.

Suddenly Queen stopped. She saw a lean and hungry looking coyote just as he was passing a big rock to the side, a hundred yards or so from the buffalo trail. The mother duck and her brood had gone about halfway down the slope to the pond. Flapping her wings alarmingly, the mother duck sounded a warning to her brood,

and the little ones vanished from the trail; then the mother duck rose into the air, flew right at the coyote, as if she meant to strike him, but dropped to the ground a few feet on the other side of him, as if she were wounded and unable to fly any further.

The coyote whirled around and leaped for the duck. Just as he was about to seize her, the duck flew up again and dropped once more with a cry as of pain a few rods farther on. The coyote tore after her, and when he got near her the duck flapped her wings as if she was trying to fly away but couldn't. As soon as the coyote was almost near enough to get hold of her, she flew up again and dropped once more a few rods farther.

In that way the duck continued to lead the coyote to the distant rim of the hollow and far beyond, out of sight. Queen stood guard over her colt, watching for his return; then, a quarter of an hour later, she saw the mother duck come flying gracefully through the air from the opposite direction. Right before Queen's puzzled eyes the perfectly normal mother duck alighted on the buffalo path at the very point from where she had taken off in pretending to be wounded. As she alighted she looked with one proud eye toward Queen and called to her little ducklings, who immediately poured into the trail from under cover of grass and weeds and followed her gayly to the water.

With a sense of deepest satisfaction over the subtle victory the duck had had over the coyote, Queen followed her to the water. At the shore, the mother duck plunged into the water and the little ducklings went in after her, the entire family sailing away to the safer middle of the

pond while Queen at the shore stood looking after them.

This lesson of duck wisdom and duck victory made a deep impression on Queen, though it puzzled her. Certainly the coyote had been near her brood, and now he was gone; and the duck and her brood were paddling away happily over the glistening waters of the pond.

Queen liked ducks because she was *not* afraid of them; and she hated coyotes because she *was* afraid of them. But her legs were fleeter now, and her hoofs sharper than when the fear of coyotes had first come to disturb the tranquility of her colthood life with her mother. Ducks and curlews and sandpipers and badgers and gophers lived their lives on the prairie without ever having harmed her, but man and coyotes were a continuous threat. Why these two should be constantly invading her life with harm was not understandable to Queen. The puzzle finally resolved itself into an irrefutable understanding—her life, and her freedom to live it, depended upon her vigilance against these two dangers.

Long as the days were at this time of the year, they succeeded each other rapidly, and each day added its bit to the weight of Queen's tormenting loneliness. Mother ducks appeared daily on the surface of the ponds with their broods of little ones; and the little ones rapidly grew big. Gophers made the slopes warm with life, and varieties of flowers succeeded each other, the tastes of some of them enriching the season's food which Nature laid out for her so abundantly. The pond in the slough shrank daily, leaving a wider and wider frame of mud around it.

But in spite of the abundance of food and water, in spite of the delight she took in her growing colt, Queen's

hunger for her companions began urging her every day with increasing intensity to go and look for them. Finally she started away from the peaceful hollow.

Because her little black colt was still too feeble to travel very fast, Queen was obliged to move slowly. Having seen the herd vanish over the ridge in the east, Queen struck out cautiously for the top of the ridge. Though it was only about two miles from the strip of woodland, it took her the greater part of the day to reach it and at that the colt protested petulantly by the time they had climbed to the top.

From the top of the ridge Queen saw the flats of a vast, treeless plain which stretched away to the horizon. It was very discouraging to see no trace of any of her companions in all that barren space, but Queen was determined and as soon as the colt had rested she went on.

All next day she travelled, badly disturbed by a sense of doubt within herself and by the loud and petulant protests of her colt. There were no signs of the herd anywhere, the country was new to her, though it was country she was used to; and the colt, unable to understand the urge that was driving her, found the miles of travel a tiresome strain for which he could see no purpose. Sometimes, struggling up some hard grade, he would stop in his tracks and protest angrily, refusing to go on. Queen would call back to him affectionately and keep going. If she was near the summit of the grade, she would go on to the top; if, looking back, she saw that he hadn't stirred, from where he had stopped, she would go on down the other slope of the hill till she was out of his sight. There she would stop and wait until she saw him

come racing over the hump, calling out to her fearfully and impatiently.

They came to a hilltop, the fourth day of this blundering journey, from which Queen, having reached it first, saw in the hollow on the other side a slough, a pond and an old horse grazing leisurely not far from the water.

For several minutes Queen stood there, lifeless as a statue, studying the old nag; then as her colt was doggedly reaching out over the last few yards, his head bobbing up and down and swaying from side to side in his weariness, she called out long, piercingly, and questioningly.

The old horse raised his head from his grazing, stood still a moment regarding her, then as anxious to have companionship as she was, called back to her an eager, welcome whinny. In fact his whinny was so eager and so familiar that Queen raced down the slope as fast as she could go, to the utter bewilderment of her colt who ran after her as if he feared she was leaving him.

Queen raced up to the old work-horse and the moment she touched noses with him, she knew him. With all the smell of barn and man that still hung about him, there was that subtle odor which she remembered becoming aware of that terrible winter night when, losing her mother, she had taken refuge in his warmth under the falling snow. She would have known him anyway by his gentle, inoffensive manner, his everlasting assurances of good-will, his careful stepping about to avoid doing anything which might be annoying.

The little black colt came trotting up to Queen whinnying complainingly and started helping himself to milk,

but Queen stepped away from him and turned so that the old sorrel work-horse could see her colt. The old sorrel reached out his gaunt neck and with his baggy lip vibrating good-naturedly touched the little fellow on the nose. The black colt had reached out curiously to him, but more as a gesture his mother expected of him, then he turned again to his supper.

It was one of the happiest evenings Queen had ever had. Grazing beside the old sorrel, her colt lying on the grass and sleeping, drinking in the pond beside the old work-horse, they lay down close together in the first half of the night. It was a calm cool night with a clear sky and stars shining, with frogs croaking in the pond and night birds singing in the distant darkness.

Toward morning they got up and went up the slope to graze, the little black colt still sleeping soundly on the grass. Queen was tearing away at the grass, a few feet from the old sorrel, thrilled by the sound of his cropping and his nearness, when the rhythm of that cropping was slowly taken over by the faster rhythm of distant hoof-beats.

Quick as a flash, Queen leaped down to her colt, who was now up on his spindly-legs, stretching sleepily. When his mother swept by him with a cry of alarm, he caught her fear from her and raced after her up the west slope of the hollow, in the direction from which they had come. When Queen turned for a second to look and see whether the old sorrel was coming with her, she saw that the old fellow still near the water was coming half-heartedly; as if he wanted to follow her, but the man on horseback, now galloping down into the hollow, was

holding him back somehow. It was when she saw the man stop close to the sorrel and tie a rope to him that she gave up waiting for him, and with a cry to her little one raced away.

The colt tried his best to follow her for he was now desperately afraid, but he just couldn't run as fast as his mother. When she was a hundred yards or so away from him, she stopped and called back to him encouragingly. As soon as he came breathlessly up to her side, after a hasty and affectionate caress, she ran on again. While the little fellow tried his very best to catch up to her, he protested bitterly against the strain.

Then when Queen looked back, she saw the man on horseback, with the sorrel work-horse jogging obediently along his side, come over the hilltop which had shut away the hollow. In her desperation to get out of reach, she allowed herself to get almost a quarter of a mile ahead of the colt, hoping that his fear would keep him running. But when she turned around again and saw that he had stopped loping and was coming heavily in a dogged walk, she raced back to him and urged him to exert himself.

The man on horseback was fast catching up with the colt. Queen was a hundred feet ahead of her colt and the man on horseback a hundred feet behind him, coming with the cautiousness of the animal that is about to leap on his prey. Queen had the feeling that she was about to lose her colt. With a sudden impulse, half-belligerent, half in subtle imitation of the mother duck who had turned upon the coyote and led him away over the prairies, she rushed at the rider and the two horses. A

few feet from them, she swerved abruptly and raced away to the side.

Surprised, the man had halted a moment. When she had leaped away to the side, the colt had turned with renewed energy and struggled after her. But a quarter of a mile north, he gave up again. Again the horseman got within a few feet of him.

Queen was frantic. She whirled around and dashed back. Then she saw the rider dismount. She called to her baby with all the terror she could get into her neigh, but he was too worn out now even to try to run. He turned appealingly toward his mother, but stopped still with his front legs spread apart as if they were going to cave in.

The man leaped upon the little fellow and threw him to the grass. Queen rushed to his assistance, rearing on her hind legs, her front hoofs threatening the man. And in the manner in which the man jumped out of the way, he betrayed his fear; but he turned upon her instantly and whirling a rope around his head moved back toward her.

Suddenly Queen felt a stinging blow on the tender end of her muzzle which took her breath away. With a gasping snort, as if she were drowning, she dropped back on all fours and shambled blindly into space.

As soon as she had regained her breath, the agonizing fear of what was happening to her colt surged up again. Back she raced, but the moment the little man creature stood up, she turned and fled again. By the time she turned back once more, the man had the colt's legs carefully tied and was lifting him from the grass. His muffled

cries infuriated Queen and by the way she leaped at him, the man knew that she meant to fight.

Quickly dropping the colt again, he not only whirled his rope but ran after her as if he was going to attack her. This time Queen ran a quarter of a mile away in terror. When she turned again, the man had the colt tied to the sorrel's back and had mounted his own horse. They were moving off, back toward the hollow.

Queen's cry turned from an appeal to her colt or a belligerent threat to the man to one of pure grief. She followed the horrible procession without hope of being able to do anything for her baby, but she could not let him go off without her.

They went down into the hollow and, though Queen was now thirsty, she had no heart to stop to drink. Up the other slope they went and off across mile after mile of prairie, Queen following doggedly behind, expressing her grief and concern in wild, silence-shattering neighs of agony. Then they rounded a hilltop from which Queen saw two huge, mushroom-like mounds loom up out of a large oblong space of black plowed land.

Queen followed them clear to the farmyard, but there she kept at a safe distance, ready to flee in a moment, calling hopelessly to her little fellow as the man struggled with him. She saw the man take him off of the old sorrel's back, and saw him stand up on his shaky legs when the ropes were untied. He called to her, and even though she raced around wildly because of that, she was at the same time relieved that she could see him stand up and hear him call to her.

When the man took her little black colt into the barn,

Queen, quivering with fear, trotted up to the barn doorway, but the moment the man appeared she tore away at break-neck speed. By the time she came back to the barn, the man had put the sorrel into the barn and was out again with his saddled pony. Suddenly he sprang upon his pony and started after Queen, swinging a rope as he came.

Queen sped away at twice the rate his saddle pony could go and, up on the rim of the hollow, she stopped to look back at him. He was quite a distance behind her, but he was coming at a steady lope; so she turned and raced on till she came to the hollow where she had found the sorrel the night before.

Here she stopped a moment to drink, but she had hardly drunk half she wanted, before she heard the horseman coming from behind the hump.

She trotted anxiously around the pond and up the opposite slope. When she got to the top of the slope, she saw that the man was not going down the hollow, but was reaching around the rim directly after her. Away she went northward, finding it not too difficult to keep ahead of him and out of his reach, but becoming more and more tired as she ran. The dogged persistence with which he was following her, as well as her own growing concern for her colt, began giving her a heavy sense of alarm and insecurity.

Had it not been for her colt, she could have raced away, leaving the horseman so far behind that he would never have found her again; but her heart was back there in that sod barn, and though she fled before her pursuer, she went only fast enough to keep out of his reach.

In the middle of the afternoon, she came to a deep dry hollow, and in the bottom of it she stopped to rest awhile. A breeze had arisen which made it hard for her to hear anything from behind. Suddenly looking up, she saw the horseman racing past the hollow along the hill-top toward the east, obviously trying to get ahead of her and to turn her back.

The desire to see her little black colt again had been growing more and more intense every hour; and with the vague notion that his passing on might give her an opportunity to get back to the barn, she waited till he was north of her and then she slipped away toward the south.

In spite of being tired and hungry, she was soon a mile or more ahead of the saddle-pony, going straight toward the distant farmyard and her baby. She was wise enough to feel that if she got there ahead of the farmer, she would have time at least to call to her colt and to hear him reply.

Long before she came to the barn doorway, she began calling to him at the top of her voice; and when she heard his anxious little neigh, she hurried to the doorway intending to go in there to him, but the door was closed. In her bewilderment, she began racing around the squatly little sod barn. Against its back wall there was a huge heap of manure, which sloped to the very thatch of the roof, and she started up its slope. But the stuff was hard to walk on, and after getting halfway up, she turned and ran down again. On the other side of the heap of manure, however, there was a small, square window-opening, and as she passed it, Queen not only heard her

colt, but saw his small black ears and the white spot of his little forehead.

Queen went wild with excitement. Running up recklessly toward the window, she stuck her head all the way in and caressed his ears and forehead and every part of him that she could reach, almost wrecking the wall in her effort to get to him. Caressing him, she forgot herself until she heard the saddle-pony arrive and heard the man dismount with a thud. Immediately she turned and raced away over the plowed field in a cloud of black dust.

Evening lowered upon the little farmyard, while Queen stood up on the rim of the hollow, looking down and calling feelingly to her little one. She hesitated going down there again now that the man was there. While she hesitated, evening turned into night and she saw a red light appear in the dark shadowy form of the house. She had seen such lights gleaming in the distances, across the prairie spaces, several times before; knowing of their connection with man and fire, she had always been desperately afraid of them.

Slowly moving around the high places above the hollow, she glared fearfully down at the light, hoping that it would disappear and let her go back to the barn window.

But the light continued to blink; and when Queen came to a point directly south and in front of the house, it appeared to have become even brighter, looking right at her like a cruel, greedy eye.

She was very tired, very hungry and thirsty again. Believing that the light was looking at her and feeling that if she were gone, it would disappear, convinced that

by daylight it would not be there, Queen shambled away reluctantly, going all the way back to the hollow where she had spent the night with the old sorrel work-horse. There, expressing her heart ache with repeated neighing, she drank at the pond and grazed a little up the slopes. But when in the middle of the night she attempted to lie down to rest, her hunger for her baby became so intense again that she got back to her feet and went trotting back to the farm.

To her great relief, the yard was completely flooded with darkness and the light was gone. Guarding carefully against the man's surprising her, convinced that he was in the house where the light had been, Queen tripped around to the back of the barn and the little window. When she stuck her head cautiously into the opening, she found her little colt lying down on the straw floor directly under it.

He leaped to his feet and reached toward her with his warm little muzzle, calling to her for help and for his supper.

Queen caressed him hungrily. The more she caressed him, the more passionately she wanted to get to him. But she wasn't forgetting the farmer. While she caressed him, she kept pulling her head back out of the window, looking in every direction, even trotting completely around the barn to make sure that he wasn't coming.

Sticking her head into that little window space and touching his little head was not helping to get him out. In her desperate search for some opening through which she could get at him, since the door in front was securely

closed, Queen ran up the heap of manure, finally going all the way up to the very roof.

But there seemed to be nothing there to help her any so she raced down again and went back to the little window. A few more caresses there proving unsatisfying, Queen tore up the pile of manure once more. As she came to within a foot or two of the thatched roof, one of her hind legs sunk into the manure, frightening her. To pull out of it, she jumped to the drier roof; as she did so, she went down into the squatly barn, taking part of the sod wall and the top of the manure pile down with her.

She knew she was in the barn and near her colt, because she had heard him let out a cry as of pain and fear as several boards had crashed. After touching him with her muzzle for a hasty moment, the idea of being trapped in the barn so terrified her that she began beating her way up the pile of the boards and straw and pieces of sod which she had knocked into the stall in crashing into it. In her beating with her forelegs in an effort to get back up on the pile of manure, she beat down half the sod wall and a good portion of the heap against it.

She managed to get back to solid ground, but the cry of terror from her colt sent her right back up the pile of manure again. In her excitement to get to him, she had gone too fast and the momentum with which she reached the top of the heap sent her down into the barn again. Again she whirled about and beat her way out, taking half the remaining wall with her; this time, when she looked back the black colt was standing on the manure heap, shivering and whinnying fearfully.

Queen called to him softly and reassuringly, the skin quivering all over her body with fear of the possible appearance of the man. Then she ran up to him again, immediately whirling around and going down again. Finally, to get him to move, she leaped away into space. In terror of losing her, the colt made his way down shakily, loping after her up the pathway by which they had come down into the hollow that morning.

When he got to her, the colt immediately attempted to get his milk, but Queen was too much afraid of the man's appearance to be willing to wait there any time. Up the slope she went galloping again, and the black colt, complaining feebly, went after her. When she finally got him to the very rim of the hollow, and looking down could see no man coming after her, she stopped to let him feed, caressing his little back frenziedly as he fed.

But before he had had half of his meal, the little black colt, with a strange weary murmur, backed off and lay down on the grass. Queen anxiously ran her muzzle all over him. Along his neck and shoulder she came upon lumps of blood. The smell of blood frightened her badly and intensified the feeling she had that she must get away from the neighborhood of the farm and the man. Calling to the little fellow, she loped away a hundred yards or so. Finding that he was not coming after her, she ran back to him, caressing him and nudging him till he got up on his feet again.

For the rest of the night, she was obliged to make what distance she could from the farmyard by continuously going back to him, caressing him and nudging him

and trying to frighten him by running off and leaving him. But while the colt remained on his feet and tried his very best to keep going, she could not drive him into anything faster than his weary plodding walk.

Queen was wise enough to know that it would be foolish to go to the hollow with the pond in it, much as she wanted to get to water, since she was sure that the man, having found her there with the old sorrel, would go looking for her there. When they had made some two miles northwest of the farmyard hollow, she veered deliberately northeastward in an effort to find some deep hollow where she might hide with her colt until he felt better.

They came at dawn to the top of a ridge beyond which, between that ridge and another one, lay a deep gulch in the dry bottom of which were several large boulders; getting her colt down there, she led him to a spot between two of the boulders and let him lie down to rest.

As he lay there, Queen attempted to do a little grazing, but she constantly came back to him to sniff at him, to caress him, and to try to get some idea of what was wrong with him. The blood on his shoulder and chest worried her greatly and it was hard for her to go off from him, even far enough to graze. Taking a bite of grass, she would lift her head and look at him, as he lay there dozing, and call to him. When he took the trouble to reply to her, the sound of his voice so gladdened her that she was able to go on grazing for several feet before she would raise her head again and call to him once more. If he didn't answer after several calls, she would trot up

to him, murmuring questioningly as she went; sniffing all over him, she would nudge him and try to get him up so that he might help himself to more milk.

But the colt would not get up, and Queen went on with her unenthusiastic grazing and kept watching him. Then, when the sun had risen high enough to shine down into the gulch and upon the colt, Queen was suddenly startled by the very distant tattoo of a horseback rider. Certain that the man was coming to look for her and the colt, she raced up the slope to the second ridge. She could see nothing from there, and by the faintness of the hoof-beats as she listened, she knew that the rider was far away. Several times she ran down into the gulch to call her colt, but since he would not stir Queen decided to leave him there and go back toward the hollow with the pond in it.

When she got to the pond and had taken a long drink, she heard the hoofbeats coming nearer. Feeling sure that the man was coming down there to look for her, she waited to let him see her; then, the moment he appeared on the rim of the hollow, she deliberately led away in the opposite direction from that of the gulch where she had left her colt.

Up at the highest point of the slope, Queen stopped to look back. She saw the man ride his pony to the very edge of the pond and saw the saddle-pony lower its head to drink. Then, when the pony had backed out of the mud, instead of taking after Queen, the man went off in the opposite direction. He was merely going around the pond, looking for her colt, but his taking that direction

alarmed Queen and she began walking down toward him, calling loudly to get his attention.

She was glad to see him turning around the pond and even more glad, when he had gotten around, to see him lope forward toward her. Immediately she turned and led him away westward across the plains, miles and miles away from her colt.

Without realizing it, Queen was emulating the wisdom of the wild duck in leading the coyote away from her brood. To keep the horseman coming after her, she deliberately slackened her pace, slowing down to a walk until she heard his saddle-pony a short distance behind her, then breaking into a lope again. The man was persistent and continued coming after her most of the morning.

Queen kept him coming after her by slowing down time after time as if she were completely worn out; then, when she got within three miles of the strip of woodland, she broke into her fastest lope, leaving him far behind.

She plunged in among the trees and breathlessly reached out for the pool of water and the glade where she had given birth to her colt. The pool was all dried up, but the glade was there and the clumps of bushes, and after Queen had circled around these and sniffed the ground where her little fellow had gamboled so happily on his shaky legs, a hunger for him seized her which she could no longer resist.

Back she went out of the woods as fast as she could go. Beyond the last of the trees, she stopped to scan the plains to the very horizon but there was no sign of the

horseman. Finding the old buffalo trail, Queen raced away; keeping her head high as she loped, looking over the plains, but seeing nothing of the horseman.

When she came to the spot, three miles southeast of the strip of woodland, where she had last seen the horseman, she discovered him on the ridge, half a mile to the south, going slowly along the ridge-top and going *westward*. Because he was not going in the direction of his farm, Queen felt that he was still looking for her, trying somehow to get around her. Until he dropped out of sight, in the southwest, she stood there motionless, watching him; then she turned and galloped away at full speed toward the hollow and the gulch beyond it.

Coming at last to the hollow, she stopped a few moments for water at the pond, then going off southward in the direction of the farm, she came to where she had veered to the gulch in the northeast. There she picked up her own trail and that of the colt, and soon went crying anxiously down the slope to the rocks.

Her little fellow was right there, between the two big stones where she had left him, but her happiness at getting back to him was short-lived. Now he was lying flat on his side, just as she remembered having caught a glimpse of him when the man had thrown him to the ground, and he was not moving.

Queen approached him slowly with trembling limbs, her head lowered almost to the grass, her eyes glowing with fear and concern. Near his little forehead, she stopped and hesitatingly touched him with her muzzle. His forehead was cold and stiff. Queen raised her head slightly and peered at him. About the wound on his chest

flies were swarming, and she angrily brushed them away with her muzzle; then she raised her head high and stared up beyond the slopes of the gulch to the empty skies above. Again she was experiencing the tragedy of her own mother and of the white mare. In her agony the confinement of the gulch became unendurable.

Up the slopes she raced to the highest point. There she stopped, gazed away across the plains in every direction, and called with all the strength in her exhausted body. Her call came back to her in feeble, mocking echoes. There was nothing there to call to. Down the slope she went again hurrying over to her baby, approaching him just as she had before. Again she nudged at the little white spot on his forehead, and again she recoiled from its cold stiffness. Once more she angrily brushed away the flies from his wounds; then, in complete befuddlement as to what she might do, she walked off a few feet and tried to graze. Every other moment, as she grazed, she lifted her head and looked back at the motionless little body lying flat on the ground between the two stones.

The confinement of the little gulch began to torment Queen. Sickened by it, she trotted up the slope to the level plains above. As she stood gazing away over the prairie convolutions, there came into her mind the image of the little fellow as she had seen him trudging along with such painful slowness behind her that morning, and she went tearing down into the gulch again.

In that aimless racing up and down the slope, the long afternoon wore away. The permanence of his lying rigid and motionless began to destroy any hope she had al-

lowed herself that he might suddenly, by some miracle, get up and drink his milk or follow her. And as that permanence became convincing, she began to feel an urge to run away, to go to the hollow, to search for the herd.

When night had lowered, Queen's loneliness became unbearable, and she trotted away to the hollow and the pond with a vague hope that she might find the sorrel work-horse there.

But there was no work-horse in the hollow about the pond. There was no one anywhere in all the empty spaces of the prairie; and so, after taking a long drink, Queen started back toward the gulch.

As she came within a quarter of a mile of the gulch, she was startled by the yapping of coyotes. She stopped dead still and listened with beating heart; then, fear burning within her, she loped away to the gulch.

When she came to the rim of the gulch and looked down, she saw two of the prairie scavengers leaping about the form of her little colt, a third sitting a short distance away. At her appearance, the third one raised his muzzle skyward and sent out the yapping warning of his tribe.

At once all three of them slunk up the opposite slope. In the starlight they were just barely visible to Queen. Their going, however, betrayed their cowardly fear of her and she bolted down to the defense of her baby.

The coyotes remained halfway up the slope, but their presence filled the darker atmosphere down in the gulch with invisible horrors. Queen was now afraid to stay there and slipped back up the slope.

As soon as she got to the top, she saw the coyotes hur-

rying down again; at once she whirled around and ran down to defend her colt. They fled again, but the moment she started up once more, they started down.

For most of the night this horrible game went on, the coyotes becoming more and more aggressive, remaining longer and longer, until Queen in hurrying down almost stepped on them. Then, one time, as she came to within a dozen feet of her colt, and the coyotes made no attempt to move, she ran amuck, rushing from one to the other and threatening them with up-raised hoof. As she drove one off her colt, another attacked it; then she actually struck one.

They scattered from before her. Giving chase, she swept blindly over them, carrying with her sensations of hoofs ripping flesh and crushing bone, and she heard a muffled yelp of pain. When she got to the top of the slope she saw two of the coyotes running off to the side of her. Emboldened by their fear of her, she turned back to her colt. In her pathway she saw the third coyote, trying to lift himself from the ground by his forelegs. Queen rushed at him and struck him with a front hoof, crushing his skull. When he dropped and began jerking in the throes of death, Queen struck him again and again with her hoof; then, sickened by what she was doing, she ran on down to her colt.

The sight and smell of what faced her there was too horrible for her to endure, and she ran back up to the top of the slope. There she remained on guard; so long as she kept watch, the other two coyotes did not return.

When dawn came, however, one last look upon what

was left of her colt and a fearful glance towards the coyote she had killed, was all Queen needed to convince her that there was nothing to be gained by remaining there. Abandoning the place forever, Queen struck out northward in desperate search for the herd.

Chapter Eight

STRENGTH OUT OF SUFFERING

DAY AFTER DAY, as the summer weeks went by, Queen sped over the endless stretches of the prairie, searching for the herd, drawn repeatedly back to the scenes where she remembered having her little black colt at her side. Peering hard across the open plains, racing breathlessly to every hilltop in the hope of seeing the herd in the next hollow, Queen found herself irresistibly wandering back to the strip of woodland, to haunt the nooks and shadows in which her baby had been born. Fleeing from the emptiness there to the emptiness about the pond in the old sorrel's hollow, she would venture, afraid and awestruck, to the bleaching pile of bones between the two rocks in the gulch. As she hurried away again, she shied at the ugly skeleton of the coyote she had killed, which lay halfway up the slope.

By the end of the last long hot spell of the summer, the futility of going back to these tragic haunts finally impressed itself on Queen; and in escaping from the shadowed neighborhood, she resumed her life-long faith in the security of the north. Going more slowly, she zigzagged across the prairies, pursuing mirages in the early

autumn haze which hung like a mist over the hilltops and the northern horizon.

Everywhere she looked, she imagined she saw the swiftly moving herd drop from sight just as her eyes focussed on some distant point; then, one autumn dusk, she came to the top of a ridge from which she saw a group of horses drinking at a small pond in the center of a large muddy flat.

For several minutes Queen stood there motionless, fascinated by the sight, eager to hurry down to them, yet cautiously hesitant. There were young horses, old horses, mares and their colts of every possible shade and color. From the rim of the hollow, it was hard for Queen to doubt that that was her own beloved herd.

They didn't seem to be aware of her presence, and Queen studied them, her eyes moving swiftly from one to another clear across the hollow. She could see no riders on the backs of any of them, and the air seemed clear of any scent of man or barn. When she could no longer restrain herself, she broke down the slope with a piercing, hungry, anxious cry.

At her first whinny, every head in the hollow lifted and turned in her direction, and from different points along the slopes came equally anxious replies. The entire group was instantly thrown into motion, a few running away in fear, but the bulk of them gathering at the pond and coming up on a run to meet her, the hollow resounding to the clatter of hoofs against turf.

Queen was so happy and so excited that her whinny was like a whine. Hurriedly and almost frenziedly, she sniffed every nose within reach, prancing around in her

emotion, unable to stand still. Most of the young horses had been colts running with their mothers, when Queen's mother had broken the range fence and started the migration northward, but some of the work-horses and several of the mares were strangers to Queen.

The most aggressive in the whole bunch was a strong and healthy bay stallion whom White-black used to put in his place when he was too attentive to Queen. Queen was happy to see him, because she had really always liked him best in the herd, next to White-black, but her greatest interest was aroused by an ebony-colored colt who was standing beside a big black mare.

Even as several muzzles were reaching to sniff noses with her, Queen hurried by them to get at the little black colt. Before she could touch him, however, the big black mare took a step forward in front of him, and exposing her yellow teeth and laying back her ears, neighed a warning to her not to touch him.

The colt pushed himself under his mother's neck and looked at Queen with large curious eyes. As Queen moved forward to touch his little muzzle, the big mare jumped in between and neighed again angrily, turning at once and nudging the colt to get him off and away.

The black colt became more curious than ever. Running off as his mother pushed him, he tripped around another mare and her colt standing nearby and came back in Queen's direction, ears pricked high and eyes glowing.

Queen trotted up to him, and running her quivering lips up his stubby mane, between his ears and down his white forehead, she caressed his milk-smelling little muzzle with an eagerness which only further alarmed his de-

voted mother. The old mare came lumbering up heavily, swept in again between Queen and her colt and pushing the colt out of the way, kicked out toward Queen with both hind legs, harmlessly beating the air, but stirring up the entire herd.

Away they raced around the pond, the big black mare leading her colt into the midst of the other mares and their colts to protect him from Queen's impassioned attentions.

Queen took after them, easily breaking through the herd to the side of the big bay stallion who was out in front. The bay noticed her desire to get ahead of him and increased his speed. When Queen found that she couldn't out-run him, she resorted to her old trick of swerving to the side. As she turned to her left, one of the slower horses, straggling along at the rear, turned with her, but the rest followed the bay stallion.

Queen stopped, disappointed, and turning up the slope pretended to be greatly interested in grazing. When the rest of the racers came around the pond again they too spread out and began to graze.

Queen raised her head and looked from one to the other. White-black was not among them, nor were some of the others she had hoped to find. A herd which she could not lead, couldn't be the herd she had so anxiously been looking for. She felt somewhat lost and estranged, and moved along restlessly from one to the other, sniffing noses again.

She came back to the big black mare and her dark-colored colt, but the old mare was no more friendly than before. She kept interposing herself between Queen and

the colt, and her angry, protesting neighing was disturbing the atmosphere of the hollow.

But Queen could not keep away from the black colt. In the middle of the night, after most of the mares had lain down to rest, she went looking for the little fellow and, finding him, lay down beside him. The big black mare got up angrily and, taking the colt with her, moved to another spot. Queen stubbornly followed them to the new sleeping place, murmuring feinely and ingratiatingly as she did so.

By morning the black mare seemed convinced that Queen's attentions were harmless; and when they lay down again, the following night, they remained close together all night like the best of friends.

It was hard for Queen, however, to remain a mere attachment of the little band; the urge to recapture her former leadership asserted itself in a thousand little ways, as the days went by. The bay stallion, on the other hand, appeared equally jealous of his ability to out-run her; and the herd continued to follow him, no matter how often Queen swerved to the side.

Then unexpectedly and without any artifice came Queen's opportunity. In the exuberance of sheer healthiness, under the spell of a huge harvest moon, the herd was racing down a hill slope two miles west of their hollow, when a fine red colt, in the lead almost neck-and-neck with Queen and the bay stallion, stepped into a badger hole. Breaking a front leg, he went down with a crash and a groan, the entire herd stampeding helplessly over him.

So fast had they been going that it was almost a quarter

of a mile north of where he had fallen before Queen and the bay stallion, with the herd behind them, were able to stop and turn back to see what had happened.

They found him in a crumpled mass, halfway up the slope, bleeding and groaning. The herd gathered around him, frightened and sympathetic, but unable to help him. Disturbed by his groaning, they moved off into the distance and grazed right around him, heads going up continuously while they grazed to look at him and to listen to him.

As the lovely autumn night lowered over the prairies, the herd became thirsty and, since the red colt had grown silent, they wandered off toward their own hollow to get a drink.

While most of the herd, after drinking, scattered beyond the rim of the hollow to graze, Queen could not forget the red colt; starting away toward the west, calling to the rest to follow, she finally got them to go back with her.

It was night when they came to the top of the slope, but the moon was very bright; when they reached the slope directly above where the red colt had fallen, they saw several coyotes swarming about him.

Queen knew clearly enough what that meant. And by their restless, frightened stamping around the hilltop, the rest of the herd showed that they too knew what it meant. But while they merely stamped about, Queen went tearing down the slope toward her implacable enemies. When the herd saw the coyotes move off from the colt in fear of her, they started hesitatingly down after her. By the time they were all down near the colt, they

could see the cowardly coyotes slinking away at the top of an opposite slope..

Moved by a strong sense of triumph, Queen turned and took after them, and she was thrilled by the sweep and power of the entire herd which she could now feel at her heels.

When Queen reached the top of the slope, the coyotes had completely vanished. She stood there several minutes peering away into the moonlit prairie spaces, and the herd standing close behind her gazed with her. Queen could almost feel their adulation and respect. Conscious of her power, she tripped away a few yards as if she were looking for the coyotes, then she swerved and broke into a run down the slope again; sure enough, the herd was directly behind her.

Down at the lifeless colt's body, she turned again and raced up the main slope, and again the herd clung to her. Whichever way she turned, the half-frightened, exhilarated herd turned with her—the younger horses right behind her, the mares and their colts in the rear. The coyotes made no attempt to come back. The moonlit night and the prairie were Queen's.

They returned time after time to the fallen colt, but there was nothing they could do for him. In the middle of the night, when the moon was covered by a cloud, Queen led the herd back to their hollow, where they drank a great deal of water and spread out to their favorite places in which to lie down to rest.

Queen had resumed her leadership because of her wisdom and the strength and fearlessness which she had acquired through her suffering. Her ruling over the little band became, for a time at least, the salvation of the herd.

Chapter Nine

MAN, TOO, CREPT NORTHWARD

THE PRAIRIE GRASS began once more to wither and grow gray. The winds under leaden skies spread an autumn shadow over the plains. Dead dry thistles began rolling helplessly over the landscape, predicting the wintry change which was fast coming upon the earth. Frost whitened the ground every morning, and geese honked warningly on their almost daily migration south.

One October afternoon, the herd was grazing along a ridgetop. The wind tugged at their manes and tails and roared loudly in their ears, making it hard for them to hear approaching hoofbeats.

Queen was startled by the sudden appearance of two horses on the rim of the hollow in which they were grazing. They were held together by harness, the hames of which protruded up above their withers like horns.

The harness, keeping them abreast of each other and very near together, at once suggested man to Queen, even though there was no other sign of man about them.

First Queen led the herd in flight across the hollow to the opposite slope, where they would be ready to race.

on if necessary; then she turned and tripped slowly and very cautiously back down again toward the strangers. Where the slope levelled out into the bottom of the hollow, she stopped and studied them, guarding at the same time the line of the hilltop behind them where it cut its conical shape against the southern sky, expecting at any moment to see men on horseback.

The two horses were so enmeshed in the black straps and splotches of the harness that they seemed abnormal in shape; but Queen had seen enough of saddles and other man made encumbrances upon horses to have a vague idea of what they were. One of the two was a white horse, the other a red one. The white horse protested loudly as he came, because the herd had fled at his approach. He was now calling placatingly as he hurried his partner along, almost dragging him against his will.

Queen listened to his whinnying with growing excitement. While it had struck her as familiar from the first, it now sounded clearly like the voice of her old mate. The herd nervously withdrew to the upper part of the slope, but she deliberately started away toward the encumbered strangers.

Her reply to him made White-black even more excited. Because his partner was stolidly holding him back, he began to balk and jerk at the harness which held him to him.

Then the red horse, worn out already by the long flight from the distant farmyard, seeing no reason for this great haste, rebelled. Bracing his forelegs against the turf, he jerked back angrily, neighing as he did so. White-black was forced to stop with him; but because of the

disturbance Queen turned and, the herd behind her, bolted up to the top of the slope. Their going off worried White-black so much that he sprang forward, taking the red horse off guard. Before the stolid fellow could brace himself again, White-black had pulled him off balance, and he was forced to go racing with him across the hollow.

Queen was slowing down, turning again to look back, when she saw the red horse stumble and go down to his knees. She saw White-black rear on his hind legs and heard the noisy snap and break of leather. The angry struggle further frightened the herd and they raced away northward for half a mile before they stopped to look back once more.

Queen saw White-black coming less than a quarter of a mile behind them, running fast but clumsily, straps swinging and dangling along both sides of him, the hames which had jutted up straight from his withers like horns, now leaning over sideways at an angle.

Somehow the change in position of those hames made Queen less afraid, and she waited for him to come nearer, calling to him enquiringly as he came on with the harness flapping and squeaking.

A few rods from her, White-black slowed down with a snort into a weary, laborious walk, swaying his bridled head as if he were exhausted. Queen slowly reached out toward him as he approached her, sniffing anxiously—then their noses touched. All doubts now as to whether or not it was White-black left Queen, but the smell of the harness and the barn about him worried her and she pranced around him, anxious to get to him and yet afraid to get

too near for fear that the harness might leap out and hurt her or trap her in some way.

White-black stopped still, breathing fast and noisily, stamping his feet restlessly, swishing his tail, and trying to shake off some of the things which clung to his head and back. By that time the bulk of the herd was gathering around White-black—but at a safe distance.

Queen looked up to see whether the red horse was also coming along behind. She didn't see him so she strained her ears to listen for his hoofbeats. As she listened she began to hear them and she watched the hillcrest, expecting him to be coming over it. In a few minutes his bridled head appeared, but at the same moment she picked up a faint but rapid patter as of horsemen coming after them from the distant south.

She did not wait another instant. When, at the head of the herd again, she came to the highest part on the slope, she saw two horseback riders, a mile or more away. The red horse, unwilling to run, was leisurely coming down into the hollow.

Away the herd went once more, straight north. White-black, clumsily bringing up the rear, was now apparently conscious of being pursued. He tried to keep in the midst of the older mares and their colts, as if he wanted to hide himself from the view of the coming horsemen.

As usual, Queen and the younger, stronger horses and mares kept well out in the lead, the older mares and the youngest of the colts bringing up the rear, this time with White-black sticking tenaciously to the midst of the stragglers. Every half hour or so Queen would slow down and rest on some hilltop, as she waited for the stragglers

to catch up. While she waited she would study the prairie behind her for signs of the horsemen.

Late in the afternoon the horsemen dropped out of sight, and when at dusk they came to a small, tree-lined river and camped for the night on the other shore, the red horse was not with them. Late in the night they moved on, coming at dawn to another vast stretch of prairie wilderness lying flat and unbroken to the very rim of the northern horizon.

Queen aroused the interest of the herd in White-black by her constant attentions to him; but White-black's disposition was under a heavy strain from the harness which gave him no rest, and the herd kept away from him. Grazing close to him, Queen was constantly stepping on some one of the harness straps hanging from him, breaking off pieces of the straps, jerking the harness that clung around his body and repeatedly irritating him. But even when he showed himself unreasonably pugnacious, kicking and laying back his ears while she would leap out of the way, Queen was patient with him, feeling in a vague way that the change that had come over him since he had disappeared was similar to the suffering she had endured at the hands of men and coyotes.

At the same time, having White-black in the herd, burdened with his harness, gave Queen the feeling that the men on horseback were steadily creeping along after them. She gave the herd little rest, keeping them continuously on the march to the north.

In time, with the constant running and with White-black's having to lie down every night and sleep on the straps and buckles in spite of the pain they caused him,

the harness itself began to give way, loosening under the strain. One day the crupper loosened, allowing the bulk of the harness to slip over and hang to the ground. One of the old mares stepped on it and tore it away from the hames. Next day, as White-black was diligently rubbing the under end of the hames on a big rock, the hame-strap opened and the hames, collar and pad slipped over his head and fell to the ground.

White-black could hardly believe it, and he jumped back expecting the thing to cling to him and drag; but when he felt that he was really free of it all, he jumped away whinnying and kicking his hind legs in an expression of infinite relief. The herd caught the contagion of his joy and off they went racing northward till they came to another hollow.

All that remained on White-black now was his bridle; and while the bridle bit had not had so much of his attention before, now that he was freed of everything else that had been hanging to him, he gave himself over to the effort to get rid of that.

It was not until the middle of winter, however, that he finally got the bridle off of his head. During a severe blizzard the herd, unable to paw for grass, spent most of its time lying close together waiting for the storm to end. Queen had always been annoyed by the straps which encircled White-black's head, because in wanting her to help him bite the things away, he would rub his head against her head and neck. Queen would understand and start chewing on the side strap, chewing till she was tired. White-black would hold his head patiently while she chewed, and the moment she stopped, would try to in-

duce her to keep chewing by rubbing the side of his head against her again. While Queen chewed at the straps, he would push with his tongue at the bit between his teeth; and one night as they worked in that way, the bit fell out of his mouth. When he rubbed his head against Queen's neck, the straps came off over his ears.

The following spring, the homesteader made another vain attempt to recapture his horse. He got near enough to the herd to see that White-black didn't have a single piece of all the harness left upon him. He could hardly believe his eyes. That night, he told his neighbors:

"That wild mare's got the devil in her. She must 'a' just took them there harness right off 'im. How else could he get 'em off? No other horse in the herd's wise enough. She's a she-devil, that mare."

Because Queen was able to defend herself, they accused her of being a she-devil; because she was noble enough to fight for her liberty, they hated her. But they had plenty of reason for hating her. Within two years after the loss of White-black, not a homesteader dared release his horses in the fall as Canadian farmers were in the habit of doing. To release them was, in all probability, taking a chance of not being able to get near enough to them to recapture them in the spring, once they strayed into the protective leadership of the wild mare.

Keeping their horses in their barns all winter meant the necessity of providing much greater quantities of hay than the homesteaders were accustomed to gather; worse than that, a winter spent in barns meant horses with far less energy for the hard labor of springtime.

Every spring all manner of attempts were made to cap-

ture Queen. All the homesteaders joined in blaming her for the herd's ability to stay out of reach, but every attempt at capture resulted only in the loss of valuable time. Some of the older and weaker horses who attached themselves to the herd in the fall were captured each spring; but the youngest, the strongest, and the fleetest remained free. Once Queen discovered that they were being pursued, it was impossible to get within a mile of her.

When these efforts to capture her became too persistent and too annoying, Queen invariably turned north and settled in new wilds. North, always north she went, maneuvering about the hills and gulches with such cunning that, for every mile she was able to put between herself and her pursuers, they were obliged to travel three.

Yet, every year, a new crop of homesteaders' shacks and barbed-wire fences appeared to the south, to the southeast, and the southwest of them. To be sure, many a shack hopefully erected one year was left gaping like an empty skull the next; but in spite of the discouraging features of the new country, many of the encroachments made annually on Queen's domains were permanent.

Every springtime, with the blooming of the wild rose bushes and the blossoming of cactus on the prairie floor, new fence posts and their glittering miles of barbed wire cut some portion of her territory away from her.

Slowly man, too, was creeping northward; and with her unbreakable faith in the safety of the unpopulated wilds, Queen fled at his approach.

Chapter Ten

THE DOOR TO THE NORTH SWINGS SHUT

SEASONS CAME and seasons passed. Colts were born in the herd and grew to maturity. Horses came wandering into the wilds from farmyards every fall and stayed with the herd for the winter. In the springtime many of these, unable to keep up with the speed of the wild horses, fell to the homesteaders who came to round them up; but the youngest of these, the strongest and the best, remained with the herd in freedom.

From the first time a rider appeared on the horizon, in the spring, through the hot lazy days of midsummer, Queen's sensitive nerves were on the alert night and day. So great had her skill in eluding the ranchers become that she began to take subtle satisfaction in playing the game with them. Circulating, zigzagging, slipping through the vast wilderness which was her home, Queen led her devoted followers around hilltops, along corridors, through valleys and ravines, and through the patches of poplar woods which appeared more frequently in their way as they moved northward.

New colts were born to Queen, and she rejoiced in

the love of each one of them as if it were the very first and only one in her life, leading each gently and wisely to maturity and turning it over, as nature intended, to its own resourceful instincts and its inherited love of freedom.

But just as the homesteaders surrounding her wilderness were unable to pry into Queen's wild free life, so she was wholly unaware of the serious changes that were steadily reshaping the country and nullifying the skill she had acquired, the skill with which she had maintained her liberty.

That the pioneer settlements which had been spreading throughout her lifetime were slowly eating away the wilds which gave her safety, Queen vaguely realized; but that the north, in which she had implicit faith, might ever be shut to her fleet-footedness never dawned on her.

Then came an unusually lovely springtime, melting away the snows of a hard long winter into lakes and ponds and rivulets. Juicy grasses pushed up green and thick among the sparse trees of the outer rim of the patches of woodland, as well as on the surface of the prairie, and the stimulating sunshine spread a wealth of flowers over the plains.

But hardly had Queen entered into this promising festival of spring, when the annual springtime riders began appearing, coming from the south, the east, and the west, not, as in other years, singly or by two's, but by four's, by sixes, and once by a dozen or more of them.

Queen felt the seriousness of the situation in the intensity with which the ranchers came after them this year; but she concentrated on the idea of keeping far

enough north, ahead of them, to hold the northway open, and she started racing northward at the slightest sound on the prairie wind of their possible coming.

As they migrated northward, the patches of woodland, which had been far apart in the south, began to appear nearer and nearer together; and then the herd came abruptly to an endless wall of trees which stretched in a continuous line from as far west as Queen could see to as far as she could see in the east.

That dark wall, shutting off the northern horizon, began to worry Queen badly. But the many horsemen who had been chasing them for more than a week, cutting away from the herd all the slower horses who had joined them the autumn before, seemed to have abandoned the chase. Queen watched for them anxiously, but she kept thoroughly alert night and day; and even as they grazed along the prairie bordering the wall of trees, she quietly felt her way through the woods at the edge of the forest, and moved from east to west along its southern edge in an effort to find an end to the wall.

First Queen had led the herd off to the east; but failing to find an end to the forest wall in that direction, she came to a barbed-wire fence which ran from as far as she could see in the south deep into the woods in the north. Moving back westward Queen was not only unsuccessful in her hope of finding an end to the forest wall in that direction; but after several days of desultory travelling, the herd came to a ridge from which they beheld a wide valley of broad squares and oblongs of plowed fields, dotted with a mushroom-like growth of homesteaders' shanties as far as the eye could see.

Apprehensively, the herd trotted back to the center of the wild strip, and grazing on the open prairies, clung to the forest wall, ready to plunge into the shadows among the trees at the first sound of danger.

They were grazing peacefully at early dawn, a week after having reached the forest wall, when the chase recommenced. Over the far, hazy southern horizon came a succession of horseback riders, moving over a ridge like the creeping flames of a prairie fire.

First Queen led the herd in a race eastward, then, remembering the barbed wire fence, she turned and plunged into the forest. There was a considerable amount of underbrush, rocks and windfalls which made going slow and difficult in places; but even where the forest floor was comparatively clean and clear, they didn't dare to move faster than at a trot.

After having travelled for about a mile northward, deep into the forest, Queen discovered with a sense of wild hope that the amount of sky visible ahead was increasing, indicating open country; but almost at the same time, she began to smell the dankness of water; and suddenly the forest floor turned down into an incline. The trees opened abruptly, and down in the depths of the canyon before them ran the broad, sky-reflecting surface of the North Saskatchewan River.

This formidable barrier to her north moved with an alarming roar, swollen with the spring flood and angry with churning muddiness, and its distant, northern shore appeared hopelessly unreachable.

For several minutes Queen stood motionless, head high, peering down at the swift and forbidding waters, watch-

ing the greater portion of a tree trunk as the stream carried it, lifting it, whirling it and bobbing it helplessly across her view; then, the nervous herd close at her heels, she started winding her way down the canyon slope.

At the river shore, Queen again stood like a statue for several minutes looking across the hopelessly broad stream, turning her head silently from side to side; then she lowered her head and began walking into the river as the herd watched tremblingly behind her. A few feet from the shore, the water sweeping swiftly past her legs, Queen brushed the muddy surface with her lips and took a long sip.

The water was sandy, and Queen chewed it, slopping it with her tongue against her teeth, letting it drip back into the river as she studied the hopelessly distant shore.

Suddenly she was startled out of her wits by a blood-curdling whoop from behind her, and whirling around she saw several men on horseback pouring down the canyon slope, coming with the overwhelming power of the muddy flood which was pouring by her feet.

Without a thought for the danger she was risking, Queen plunged into the deeper part of the stream and began to swim, beating with her hoofs against the current in a desperate effort to cross to the other shore, but feeling herself at once picked up and carried eastward to the side. As the current lifted her, she caught sight of White-black and the bay stallion coming into the water after her, and back of them several other horses were leaping in, in terror of the horsemen. The bulk of the herd, however, too much afraid of the water, was heard stampeding away up the cluttered shore.

Queen was swimming out of sheer desperation and by instinct. She was afraid of the violence of the current, but she was even more afraid of the men. Bravely she beat with her hoofs against the swirling stream, keeping her head above the surface, hearing, as she was being swept along, the disorderly clash and clatter of hoofs on the cluttered shore, and the occasional cry of one of the men, which rose above the whinnying of the horses and the roar of the river.

As the shore noises faded away in the distance, Queen's fear of the current began to get the better of her and she began to struggle against it in an effort to veer back toward the shore.

The current swept her along eastward, but her struggling turned her toward the shore and soon she felt the pebbly ground under her hoofs:

Breathing hard, Queen slowly made her way over the wet stones underneath, snorting loudly as her shoulders rose above the surface. Had the men been there, when at last she made the dry stones of the shore, Queen would have been unable to resist them. She was now completely exhausted.

A hundred yards upstream she saw the bay stallion climb out of the water onto the shore and shake himself; worried about White-black, Queen turned to look for him in the water. She then discovered his white ears and blazing eyes out in the current, trying to break out of its grip, looking toward her on the shore. It was several minutes before he struck ground and came sputtering toward her, shaking the water from himself like a dog.

Soon the bay stallion came walking up to them slowly,

and the three of them, still sputtering, breathing heavily, their big sides throbbing, turned in every direction to guard against being surprised by any of the horsemen. But from where they were resting, trying to get back their strength, there was not a living thing visible, and the roar of the stream and the beating of their own pulses in their ears made hearing difficult.

They had barely regained their breaths, however, when they saw two men on horseback a quarter of a mile up the shore, their saddle-ponies picking their way over the rocks in their direction. Immediately the three of them, as with one thought, struck out toward the east, picking their way slowly over the stones, feeling the presence of the men and their ponies in the distance behind them.

The shore was badly cluttered there with rocks and windfalls, but they realized that the ponies in pursuit of them had just as great difficulty in making their way after them.

In that slow and laborious way, they travelled eastward for an hour without stopping to look back; and then they came abruptly to a barbed-wire fence which came down the slope of the canyon and reached out into the river.

Queen walked straight up to the wire; pressing carefully against it, she raised her head over the topmost strand and looked helplessly down the shore that was now barred to them. The men who were coming after them were not yet in sight. Afraid of being so near the fence where the men could corner them, Queen turned and began nervously to retrace her steps up the cluttered

shore, keeping her head high and stopping often to peer at every tree and rock and shadow for the first reappearance of the men.

They had gone back but a very few rods when they saw the men coming around a huge boulder. Queen stopped so suddenly that White-black, behind her, head lowered, struck her rump and backed off frightened, backing into the bay stallion behind him. Queen took a hasty, frightened glance backward. The fence was there.

With a frantic call to her companions, she leaped into the river again. In a few minutes the current lifted her up and again turned her eastward. In turning, she was relieved to find that both White-black and the bay stallion were close behind her.

There was a bend in the Saskatchewan beyond the barbed-wire fence, and the current turned sharply northward, taking them out almost to the middle of the river. But when, in terror, they began beating their way out of the powerful current, they were at least a quarter of a mile east of the end of the fence.

Back on the shore, there was no sign of their pursuers; and although they rested there for half an hour before going on, the horsemen did not reappear.

About three miles east, down that cluttered shore, they came upon another barbed-wire fence, on the other side of which they saw a herd of cattle, some grazing, some browsing, some merely lying down and chewing their cuds, all looking up wild-eyed at them.

Queen was not afraid of cattle, although she had not seen very many of them in her life, and she was not going back into that river again if she could help it. Not

far from the fence was an open glade along the slope and on that they stopped to rest and to graze.

There they grazed all afternoon, and toward evening, certain that the horsemen had given up the chase for the day, Queen started up the incline, heading for the prairies south of the wall of forest which lined the canyon, where she hoped to find the herd.

They came out of the strip of forest into a vast, silent plain which stretched away, open, to the southern horizon and the sky above it. The sun had set and the wind had died down, and over the still lighted prairie hung as peaceful and lovely a spring evening as Queen had ever known.

They remained standing in the shadows of the great wall of trees for several minutes, staring hungrily over their beloved plains; then, with a call which tore out of the depths of her big body, Queen started away southward, searching eagerly for the herd. White-black was on one side of her, the bay stallion on the other, all guarding desperately against any possible surprise from the horsemen.

A mile and a half south of the wall of trees, they came to the kind of prairie slough they loved so much, and they settled down for the night, stopping to drink the clear water and grazing guardedly to the north of it.

All night long, Queen peered into the darkness looking for some one of the herd to come straying down the hollow, but nothing disturbed the peaceful quiet of the prairies.

Toward daybreak, as was their habit, they got up and drank at the pond in the hollow; then they started graz-

ing, moving as they grazed in the direction of the wall of trees along the canyon of the Saskatchewan so as to be near the woods when the horsemen came after them again. And the horsemen did come again before the sun had arisen. They were halfway back to the line of forest when they heard the saddle-ponies coming.

Because the first horsemen they heard came from the south, they struck out for the river in the north; but when they got within a few yards of the wall of trees, half a dozen horsemen appeared, coming out of the shadows between the trees.

White-black had been loping about fifty feet behind Queen and the bay stallion. When Queen and the stallion stopped because they were stunned at seeing the men coming out of the woods, White-black turned and started back southward.

Queen also turned around, but when she saw the men loping across the plains from the south, she turned again. She saw the bay stallion reach for the woods at an angle eastward, and though she was sure that men were coming from the east also, she took after him, feeling that they could get into the woods before those men could stop them.

By the time Queen and the stallion had come to the first of the trees, the men from the east were coming at them up a slope. They swerved quickly westward, intending to break into the forest; and as they turned, Queen saw a whole circle of horseback riders surrounding White-black. He had reared on his hind legs, and Queen saw ropes flying around his head.

At that moment, the stallion plunged into the darkness

between the trees and Queen turned with him. They were too uncertain of the woods to go very fast. The skin quivering all over their bodies, they picked their way in and about, close together, hearing and feeling the horsemen's ponies gaining upon them a few rods behind. As they came to the lip of the canyon, the trees being farther apart and daylight now stronger, they let themselves down the slope at a reckless speed. Halfway down, the stallion veered one way and Queen another to avoid a huge windfall in their way.

Suddenly Queen heard a clash as of hoofs striking stone and, turning nervously, she saw the bay stallion go rolling over forward several times, down the incline, and come with a horrible crash against a boulder at the bottom.

So fast had he rolled that, although she had been slightly ahead of him, she had to run several feet to get to him. His neck was bent under his body, and from his muzzle which protruded backward between his doubled forelegs, oozed a stream of blood.

Queen called frantically to him, but the sound of the riders coming down the slope behind her sent her racing on for the river. She slipped several times on the wet rocks before she had splashed into water deep enough for swimming.

The current immediately picked her up, and being near to the bend in the river shore carried her out to the middle of the stream, across the wide mouth of the inlet, taking her past the fence which had stopped them the day before, and past a second fence which jutted out into the river a quarter of a mile beyond that.

When she finally clambered back upon the shore, coughing and sputtering, too worn out even to shake the water from her body, she crept into the shadow between two huge boulders, completely shut away from sight of anyone west of that point. Feeling safe for the time being, Queen stopped against the side of the largest of the boulders; and here she stood, her sides throbbing and dripping, for the rest of the morning.

In the middle of the day, she ventured out of her hiding place and started down the shore eastward, picking her way slowly and cautiously peering into every shadow, in every direction, before moving. Some three miles farther east, she came to a stretch where the shore was much less cluttered. For nearly a quarter of a mile the slope, halfway up, was open and covered with grass; since she could see no sign of life anywhere near the glade, she remained there for the night.

In the morning, she climbed the canyon slope and stealthily made her way through the forest wall to the prairies beyond it. Up on the flats, she clung to the shadows between the trees at the edge, and every time a rider appeared on any of the criss-crossing roadways, or she heard the rumbling of a wagon, she bolted back into the woods and down to her secluded glade.

In a few days, however, her loneliness became so intense that Queen became more and more reckless and began to risk being seen. Little by little, her love of the open plains and her hunger for the companionship of the herd sent her farther and farther south, even though the prairies there were badly cut up with oblongs of plowed-up fields and farmyards. Miles and miles of

barbed-wire fences cut the vast plains into ranges and turned the free prairies into a maze of treacherous avenues between the innumerable pastures.

Although shunning these pastures as well as farmyards and plowed fields, Queen's loneliness kept driving her farther and farther into the open spaces between the pastures, searching for her old companions, seeking any companionship. Wherever she saw a horse in a pasture, Queen would race up to the barbed-wire fence and, keeping a sharp and nervous lookout against any sign of man, she would call and call till the horse would come up to the fence on the inside and they could touch noses over the strands of wire.

She came to one of these avenues of barbed wire between two pastures, far out upon an open plateau, and saw in the pasture to the right, half a mile away, a whole group of horses who had an air of familiarity about them. Queen raised her head over the topmost strand, and sent out a hungry call to them. The prairies took up her call and echoed it back from the distance. Several heads went up at once, and then the group came running toward her.

There were nothing but cattle in the pasture to the left, and they were far away on a hilltop; and there were no farmyards or houses visible anywhere. Queen became so anxious to see these horses and to make sure whether or not they were her companions, that she dropped her usual cautiousness and raced up the avenue to meet them.

A quarter of a mile deep in the twenty-foot avenue between the two pastures they met, and over the topmost strand of barbed wire they sniffed noses and murmured and whinnied and neighed, Queen recklessly pricking

her chest with her anxious pressure against the barbed wire, her companions inside pushing each other in the effort of each one of them to get to touch her over and over again.

These were, most of them, her former companions, but White-black was not among them, nor was the bay stallion there. A thousand times Queen called, sniffing at noses over and over again, without finding White-black or the bay, frightened every little while by some distant sound which would send her racing away, the herd inside the wire racing along with her, until she came to the opening in the avenue, and her companions to the corner of the pasture. There Queen spent the night, lying down or grazing outside the pasture, as her friends lay down or grazed inside of it in the corner.

When, next morning, a man appeared on horseback, inside of the pasture, Queen fled back to the forest wall. All of that day, Queen was afraid to go back to her companions, but deep in the night she picked her way cautiously back to the avenue between the two fences, and desperately hungry for sight of her companions, ventured deeper and deeper, calling frantically to them as she went, getting only the terrifying distant barkings of dogs for response. Several times these strange, distant sounds sent her loping back to the open plains, but when the sounds died away, she would try again, going a little farther up the avenue each time.

Toward morning she came to the edge of the plateau and found that the avenue of wires in which she was, turned at right angles to the left. As her friends had been in the pasture to the right, and as she was afraid of being

trapped in going to the left, she stopped and looked away into the pasture to the right and down the slope from the plateau. Far off to the right, beyond the pasture in which her companions were confined, she saw a cluttered farm-yard. The sight made her nervous and she turned and trotted down the avenue anxious to get back into the open once more before she made another search for her friends.

As she came within a hundred yards of the end of the avenue between the fences, she was horrified by the sound of hoofbeats. Looking up nervously, she saw a man on horseback a quarter of a mile or so ahead, coming at a gallop toward the opening.

Queen's instincts urged her to turn and run in the opposite direction, but she had just been up that avenue and felt that there would be no way of escape if she did so. The thing to do, she finally decided, was to race toward the man and try to get to the opening before he did. She was desperately afraid to do that; and in her hesitation she lost what chance she had of succeeding. She was only a few yards from the opening when the man reached it.

Queen whirled around and went racing back up the avenue between the two pastures. As she went she got the feeling, from the swift patter behind her, that the man was coming after her. When she increased her speed, she could hear the saddle-pony come faster.

She got to where the avenue turned to the left, barely a dozen feet ahead of the rider; having nothing else left to do, she turned left and raced at top speed.

She came to the south side of the plateau, and as the

avenue between the wire fences went on down the slope, she was forced to go down, but she went slower and slower. Before her appeared another ranch yard, and from its teeming, evil-smelling, cluttered center came a noisy, savagely barking dog.

Taking things in swiftly, Queen saw that there was now no escape. In front of her was a barbed-wire fence gate, and behind the dog another man and a boy came running from the house.

As the dog was the nearest, Queen stopped and lifted her front right hoof to defend herself against him. The dog was as savage as a coyote and, unlike a coyote, instead of running away, he kept leaping at her, whirling back when she struck, but turning about and attacking her again immediately afterward.

While she was trying desperately to defend herself against the vicious dog, she was conscious of a great deal of activity. Behind her was the man on horseback, making her turning impossible, and before her the man who had come out of the house was climbing the post at the side of the gate.

Suddenly a rope loop flew through the air and fell upon her head. Despite the snarling dog, she stepped back to get out of its way and felt the rope tighten about her neck. Blood-curdling yells arose from several directions and the barbed-wire gate swung open.

As the man on horseback behind her came up to her, striking her a blow on the rump, Queen leaped forward into the dirty yard. In her excitement she thought that she saw a way out of the yard and made a dash for it, but when she got to the center of the yard, the rope pulled

her back with a jerk that cut into her skin and choked the breath out of her.

Unable to run, she reared on her hind legs and attempted to fight with her forelegs, the men surrounding her. That was just what the men wanted her to do. Quickly throwing another rope loop, they caught one of her forelegs. Queen fell forward and tried to kick at the man behind her with a hind leg. Soon she felt the rope on that hind leg; then suddenly she went down on her side with a sickening thud.

A spell of nauseating dizziness came over her and Queen shut her eyes, her legs relaxing and stretching out. She felt the men working quickly over her, but she was too dizzy to think of resistance.

As soon as the spell of dizziness lifted, Queen again made an effort to fight. She was not only horribly tied down, but the moment she lifted her head, one of the men leaped upon her and, seizing her nose bone with both hands, gave her head a quick twist upward, rendering her completely helpless.

She lay there for a long time incapable of moving, the evil-smelling man at her head hanging on cruelly to her nose. Suddenly she began to smell smoke and fire. She made an attempt to struggle free again, but the hold the man had upon her was as of iron. The slightest effort on her part to free herself only increased her agony, the hateful fingers digging deeper into her flesh.

She was lying there helplessly, wondering in her agonized bewilderment what was going to happen next, when she felt a pain on her shoulder which was worse than any pain she had ever experienced. They were pressing a hot,

burning instrument into her skin, and a new kind of smoke with the smell of burning hair swept upon her upturned nostrils.

She let out a helpless groan and the man suddenly sprang away from her head, releasing her nose bone.

Queen made an attempt to get up, but the men immediately pulled on the ropes on her legs. At the same time, her moving sent a wave of pain from her burnt shoulder down her leg; in despair, Queen dropped her head back flat on the ground and exhaled in a long resounding sigh.

When she reopened her eyes, a few minutes later, the men were standing near her, talking to each other as they looked down upon her; and in the blurred distance, she saw two horses cropping grass indifferently.

The smell of her burnt flesh in the welter of nauseating odors, the pain in her shoulder, the lack of excitement on the part of the men standing around her, the cool deliberateness with which they had gone about her torture, and the fear of what they were yet to do, bewildered Queen; and out of this bewilderment emerged a feeling which was worse than that of either fear or pain, a feeling which was an ally of both, the feeling of submission.

Chapter Eleven

S U B M I S S I O N

QUEEN WAS BRANDED! A large letter B was burned through the hair and almost through the skin on her right shoulder. The red-hot metal had broken through the skin in several spots on the curves of the letter, and from these spots oozed drops of blood. For a long time, the air passing over the wound kept the pain of it at its original intensity.

When the ropes first loosened their hold upon her, Queen thought that she was free and sprang to her feet. A hasty look around made her feel that she could now get away. But the moment she leaped forward, the ropes became taut again. One of her front legs was drawn back to the opposite hind leg, throwing her off balance, and before she could right herself, she went down on her side again with a crash that muddled her brains.

When she raised her head again, the men were looking at her quietly. In the distance the fire that had heated the branding iron was still smouldering, its fitful stream of smoke still poisoning the air.

Queen was thoroughly convinced now that they were stronger than she—that for the time being, at any rate,

she had no power, no means of defending herself against them. And their power over her was all the more dreadful because she had no way of knowing what they wanted of her.

When the man in front of her began pulling at the rope around her neck, she struggled back to her feet, not so much to obey him but because of her terror of what they were going to do next. When she did get back to her feet, her flanks quivered and her legs trembled with the fear that they were going to throw her again. Because the rope slackened a bit, at her rising, she thought that all they had wanted of her was to get up; but when they began pulling at the rope once more, she was sure that they were about to pull her feet from under her again.

In bewilderment, she braced herself against her four legs, unnaturally spread out, and pulled back on the rope with all her strength, until she received a blow on her rump from the man behind her. When she leaped forward, to get away from him, the man in front ran on a few paces and began pulling on the rope again.

After several repetitions of these meaningless antics, Queen finally got the idea that they wanted her to keep moving after the man in front of her who continued to pull on the rope; and while she would have liked to run away from him, she had to walk to him and after him. But the air of the farmyard resounded with the enthusiastic exclamations of approval because she was learning so rapidly.

They led her around the yard several times; and then the man pulled her toward the dark doorway of the barn,

from the terrifying darkness of which issued a dank, sour stench.

Queen knew that they wanted her to follow him in there, and by this time she had a clear enough idea of the agony they would inflict upon her if she did not do what they wanted. In spite of that, her horror of the black hole before her was so great that regardless of the consequences, she attempted to save herself from it.

Bracing herself against her forelegs, she pulled her head back and upward, pulling with such force and suddenness that she pulled the man off his feet. Then, despite the burning lashes of the whip which the man behind her was laying to her back and rump, Queen reared on her hind legs and swerving to the side bolted away toward the center of the yard, dragging the man with her. But just as she was beginning to think that she was regaining her liberty, the ropes pulled her two legs together, and again she went down with a thud, a cloud of dust filling her nostrils, things blurring before her eyes.

When they forced her to her feet again, and the man in front began pulling on the rope, she followed meekly and tremblingly, holding back a mere second at the barn doorway, then bolting inside in terror of the whip behind her.

There was a stall very near the doorway; and when Queen hesitated about entering it, one lash of the whip on the network of welts already raised on her rump, sent her in so fast that she almost stepped on the man in front of her, who quickly jumped into the manger.

There the man pulled the rope through a hole in the beam, at the top of the manger, and began pulling at it

through the hole. As he pulled forward, the man behind Queen laid the whip to her. Her head was pulled down and over the manger top, and there they held it helplessly till they had put a halter upon it.

The halter was tied to the manger by two ropes, one going to the right, the other to the left; but when they had released and removed the rope they had first thrown around her head, Queen was greatly relieved. She was helplessly tied, but the halter and these two ropes did not cut into her skin.

As soon as they had her securely tied by the halter, they proceeded to remove the ropes from her legs, in the process of which Queen almost killed them. Immediately after that, however, they walked out and let her alone.

It was dark in the barn, and it took Queen's eyes, used to the open prairies all her life, a long time to adjust themselves so that she could see at all. But after she had become slightly adjusted to the gloom and had become somewhat accustomed to the revolting stench, she tried to look about her as far as the two ropes would allow her. She raised her head high, above the partition between her stall and the next, and she saw way over in the third stall, a reddish old horse, chewing busily, wholly indifferent to her, wholly unmindful of the darkness or the smells.

Queen pulled on her ropes as far as she could so as to turn her muzzle in his direction, then she called out to him. The old glutton replied indifferently, too busy gorging himself with hay to be very much concerned about her troubles.

Queen tried to get an idea of what he looked like

through the sides of her eyes. The ropes prevented her turning far enough to see him very well, and the partition beam prevented her seeing the greater part of him; but what she did see assured her that he was not suffering. The fact that he was not being tortured was a great relief to her.

Every muscle in her body seemed to be aching, and the welts on her rump, as well as the burning wound on her shoulder, stirred up the bitterest of resentment. In her utter helplessness, she broke into a fit of pulling and kicking, till the old glutton, afraid that he was going to be hurt, neighed to her angrily.

The sound of his voice quieted her down a bit; but when the resentment against her terrible hurts welled up again, she broke into another unreasonable struggle. This time she moved her head up and down, the only way the two ropes allowed her, shaking it with growing violence as her resentment increased. Suddenly her delicate muzzle struck something sharp along the beam of the manger; and now she had a painful wound on her lip. From the gash she had given herself, drops of blood trickled down into her mouth and frightened her.

All day Queen stood in that hateful stall, surrounded by boards and held by unyielding ropes, shying with alarm at every sound, slipping off into a doze now and then in which she dreamed of regaining her freedom, of finding the herd, of swimming the formidable Saskatchewan.

In the afternoon the farmer came in and, afraid of her heels, came to her by way of the manger, which led clear across the barn from one stall to the next. At sight of him

in front of her, having no other way of defending herself, Queen bared her teeth threateningly, laying back her ears and neighing angrily. The farmer slapped her muzzle and struck the gash on her lip. Queen pulled back, closing her eyes, and the farmer went about putting hay into her manger for her.

When he was gone, Queen examined the hay, looking at it and sniffing it, timidly. She had at different times in her migration northward come upon stacks of hay, and while she preferred the living grass, she had eaten some of it and knew that it was fairly good. She was hungry now and could have eaten some of the hay, but she was vaguely afraid of it, afraid that something painful would come from eating it, as something painful had come out of every move the men had made.

Later when the man returned and went into the next stall and pushed a pail full of water through the partition to her stall, Queen began kicking violently at the partition. The farmer left the pail of water, and in going past her stall, slapped her rump and made the welts on it smart.

Slowly it became clear to Queen that kicking and baring her teeth was only earning her more pain. When the farmer came in again and from the other stall reached in and moved the pail of water so that she could reach it, she neither kicked at the partition nor bared her teeth at him, but merely drew her head back fearfully as far as the two ropes would let her.

Night began lowering, cutting down the streams of daylight which had been trickling in from several small openings in the barn walls. Less able to see, Queen be-

came more and more nervous at every sound. As she strained to look sideways, she saw the man come in again. He walked into the stall of the big red horse and soon backed out with him. Queen realized, as they trudged past her and out of the doorway, that she was being left all alone in the bad-smelling little barn. The night was coming and she was to be tied in that dark hole alone. This made her feel so frantic, she began to whinny for the old fellow to return.

But neither the red horse nor the man paid any attention to her cries. When the farmer came back, he shut the door and the evil-smelling barn went totally dark. Queen called again and again, but no one heard her, and her own voice in the darkness seemed to fill the hateful place with things which she could not see.

Frightened by the echoes of her own voice, Queen stopped her noise and listened. Every time she heard the slightest scratching sound, she could feel the skin quiver along her flanks; and every time she made the slightest sound, stepping around nervously with her hoofs, she thought she had heard something behind her.

The night dragged horribly. When dawn came at last, Queen was so exhausted that she went to sleep on her feet; and there she was sleeping when the man came in after sunup and woke her by opening the barn door.

Queen was greatly relieved by the current of fresh air that broke into the barn and was glad to see the daylight again. The farmer seemed to have a great deal to do in the barn, but he did not come near her. Chickens came in, squawking timidly, and first venturing into her stall or the one next to her, some of them jumped up on to the

manger and began picking stray oat grains out of the oats box.

Queen watched them with the interest with which she used to watch sandpipers, running along the muddy shores of a pond; and the contented singsongs of these chickens began to give her a faint sense of companionship which lessened the torment of her solitary confinement.

Toward the middle of the day, the boy came in. He got into the manger, in the stall next to Queen's, and moved over in front of her. During the tortures of her capture, Queen had been especially tormented by this boy's noisiness; she was almost more afraid of him than of the man. When he took hold of the ropes and began pulling her toward him, Queen began stamping around her stall in fright. Just then the farmer came in. The boy let go and scrambled out of the manger, and Queen heard the man yelling angrily at the boy, who fled out of the barn. As he reached the doorway, Queen saw the man strike him, and heard him yelp painfully. The fact that the man had defended her against the boy was not wholly lost upon Queen.

The farmer gave her some oats, and brought her water twice that day; and while standing in the barn was difficult to endure, Queen was not suffering now the acute agonies she had endured during the first few hours of her captivity.

Night came again. While Queen began to feel uneasy as the daylight was fading, she faced this night with far less anguish than she had suffered through the first. When the following dawn came, having slept during

portions of the night, her gladness to see daylight made her partially resigned to her confinement. The tormenting monotony of standing on her feet slowly subsided, as had most of her other pains. But sometimes, as she stood, shifting her weight from one side to the other, calls of distant horses penetrated into her prison, and Queen would set the farmyard rattling with her emotional replies.

There was no particular satisfaction in refusing to eat or drink. So now Queen began to nibble at the hay, to try the oats, and to drink the water in the pail which the farmer regularly placed beside the manger. As soon as her manger was half empty, the farmer would refill it with hay, and as soon as the wooden pail was dry he refilled it with fresh water.

Eventually she welcomed his coming with hay or with water, after long tedious hours of standing; and instead of bringing the water into the next stall and shoving it through the partition, the farmer began coming right into Queen's stall and depositing the water in front of her. The first time he did that, Queen was frightened and became nervous, but as it became a regular visit Queen ceased to be excited when he came. Then one day, the farmer removed one of the ropes. Queen was able to turn her head farther back and to look around her stall and the rest of the barn more easily; this added some interest to her life and helped her endure her monotony.

Queen's greatest amount of learning in all this came about through a process of contrasts. Every undesirable pain set itself against a more undesirable pain, and she

learned to choose the lesser of any two evils that beset her.

When she grew so weary of standing that her legs ached in the joints, holding up the weight of her body, Queen would lie down on the dirty floor. The smell of the floor was loathsome to her, and so she would get up after a few minutes and stand again for several hours, standing until the loathsomeness of the smell of the floor became less tormenting than the ache of long standing. So she would lie down and remain there for longer and longer periods, till the smells ceased to bother her. And she discovered that lying down and dozing during the night helped to hurry the ugly darkness away.

How many such lessons Queen still had in store for her she had no way of knowing; nor did she realize that in this learning of them, she was acquiring the submission her captors demanded of her.

Chapter Twelve

LEARNING TO EVADE PAIN

ONE SUNNY MORNING Queen was dozing over her empty manger, from which she had eaten every spire of hay for want of something better to do, when she heard the dog bark with unusual excitement. By the increasing rapidity with which his barks succeeded each other, she could tell that something unusual was coming nearer and nearer. She soon heard the rumbling of a wagon; and when that sound came very close and then stopped abruptly, it was followed by the clatter of many voices.

She had so often allowed herself to fret over unusual or new sounds which failed to be harmful to her, that Queen was now inclined to feel that these things were not going to affect her; and she went back to her dozing with but one eye and one ear on guard.

In the midst of her dozing, she was suddenly aroused by the entrance of two strange horses smelling of sweat and leather, one of them going heavily into the stall next to her with a swishing of straps and a rattle of metal links and buckles.

This sudden possibility of companionship cheered

Queen. She perked up with interest, and raising her head, called to them sociably. But the two big draught horses stamped their feet on the floor of their stalls as they rummaged greedily in their mangers and their oats boxes, too much concerned about food to take time to answer her.

Queen raised her head over the partition wall and whinnied again cordially. The big horse next to her moved his head so as to touch her nose, but finding that she was not bringing food, he impatiently returned to his futile licking at the empty oats box in his stall.

The touch of his big nose intensified Queen's hunger for companionship and she whinnied more loudly than before, hoping that the fellow in the third stall would be more friendly.

Suddenly she felt a slap on her rump which so frightened her that she almost jumped into her manger. The man who had slapped her came into her stall beside her. He came very carefully, calling out "whoa there, whoa there," in long-drawn sounds, his voice a strange mixture of appeal and warning.

Queen edged nervously to the side of her stall, away from him, and watched with a rising sense of fear. She recognized him by his smell as the man who had dug his fingers into her nose-bone so cruelly, twisting her head until she was helpless.

When she showed signs of panic, the man jumped into the manger where he would be safe, then loosening the rope by which Queen was tied, he put the end through a hole in the middle of the manger beam and began pulling it until he had Queen's muzzle right down to the heavy board so that she could not move her head.

While Queen pulled back with all her strength in a futile effort at resistance, he slipped a bridle over her ears. As he moved his evil-smelling fingers all over her head, he kept talking to her, his voice coming now threateningly, now placatingly.

In the meantime, his thumb forced its way in between her jaws, back of her teeth, and as she opened her mouth in an effort to dislodge his thumb, he slipped the iron bit between her teeth. Quickly fastening the strap under her head, he released the rope.

Angered by the way he humiliatingly moved his fingers all over her face and into her mouth, Queen jumped back, glaring at him and trying to push the hateful iron bit out from between her teeth. But while the rope had been removed, the man was holding the two long straps attached to the bridle; when she jumped back, he cruelly jerked the reins in anger because she didn't like his tormenting her. His pulling at the reins turned the twist or hammer in the middle of the bit, and it struck a sharp blow at her palate and clamped down upon her sensitive tongue.

Badly frightened by this new torment placed within her own mouth, Queen tried to avoid angering the man, stepping back out of his way with trembling legs. The man then jumped out of the manger and, holding on to the reins, waved his hand at her, driving her back out of the stall and into the main part of the barn. There he moved quickly toward the barn doorway.

Queen, afraid to pull back on the reins for fear that the hammer would strike at her palate and tongue again, followed him. She caught a glimpse from the open door-

way, of a large group of people in bright and frightening colors, standing in a semicircle around the farmyard. But the moment she shrank back, the pull on the reins hurt her tongue and mouth.

The full light of day, to which she was no longer accustomed, strained her eyes; as Queen followed the man blindly, afraid of resisting him, she saw a welter of things in motion. With the loud talking and laughing came the noisy barking of many dogs; and when Queen's eyes cleared a bit, she made out several of these coyote-like creatures, one running across the yard, one to the side of the wagon, and another under it in the shadow, like a coyote in his den.

Queen was completely bewildered by all these things and sounds, and in her anxiety not to pull on the reins, she pranced after the man in a manner which delighted the onlookers—lovers of graceful and magnificent horse-flesh.

The man led her around the big yard, in a wide circle around the wagon in the center, and past the semicircle of spectators. Several times he walked around, then he began to run; but whether he walked or ran, Queen's greatest concern was to avoid pulling tight on the reins and so to prevent the hammering in her mouth.

When the man stopped beside the wagon, Queen glared around her, her great sides throbbing, her breath coming loud and painfully. Her hope that they would be taking her back to the comparative safety of her stall made her look toward the barn and she saw the farmer come out, carrying a saddle, a heavy mass of leather with

more straps hanging and dangling from it, some of these dragging like snakes on the ground.

Queen was standing against the side of the wagon when this new instrument of torture was pushed threateningly toward her. She reared on her hind legs in an impulsive attempt to escape it, but immediately the reins were jerked down, and with a wild snort of terror she calmed down again. Once more, in an effort to evade the pain which these creatures found so easy to inflict, Queen submitted.

They placed the saddle upon her back, while her skin quivered under it. They tightened the cinch around her belly so closely that Queen was ready, regardless of pain, to break into a fit of rebellion. When the man began leading her around the yard with that thing strapped upon her back and pressed into her skin, she followed obediently, but her eyes blazed as she looked about her for some opening through which she might bolt away. It was while she was obsessed by the mad idea of breaking away that the man suddenly leaped into the saddle.

Queen had seen many men on horseback, so there was enough of the accustomed about it to check slightly the frenzy and bewilderment that the experience aroused; yet the weight of that big creature, added to the disagreeable tightness of the saddle, made her attempt to throw him, in complete disregard of the consequences. As she leaped forward, however, her half-blinded eyes suddenly beheld an opening sweep of prairie. Because she had gone forward, the man had loosened his hold on the reins. Free to go forward, she was able to give expression to the maddening urge in her brain.

Away she galloped, up over a hilltop and out upon an open plain; and then, -with hatred like heat in her blood, she made her last attempt at rebellion. Clamping down upon the iron bit and trying to hold it though it grated on her teeth, she braced herself against her forelegs and shook and snapped the rear of her body. She felt that she was shaking the hateful burden from her back; but she felt at the same time fierce stabs of pain in her flanks as the rider dug his sharp spurs into her skin.

Queen was almost too insensible to pain now, however, to be conquered by anything like this. Out in the open on her beloved prairie, alone with this man, fighting was on a somewhat more fair basis. She leaped. She hopped. She shook herself and balked, jumping, shaking, rearing on her hind legs; and then, failing in all these violent efforts, Queen threw herself to the ground.

The trainer jumped in time to avoid a broken leg; but the moment Queen leaped back to her feet, and bolted away, he was back on the saddle. He not only held on to the reins this time, but when she started to rebel again, he leaned forward and, striking the side of her head with his hat, poured a blood-curdling shriek into her ear.

Queen turned away from the direction from which the hat had struck and galloped as fast as she could for nearly two miles; then, when the man struck at her head from the opposite direction she turned and raced back again over the same two miles. When, instead of using his hat, he held the reins so that one of the straps on one side of her neck pressed against her, Queen turned again. After a little while, he let the other rein press against the other side of her neck in the same manner; and when to

avoid trouble she quickly turned once more, the man praised her, his voice coming in a soothing softness.

But Queen did not appreciate his praise nor did she experience any affection for him because his voice had softened. She was desperately anxious to avoid doing anything punishable, because every cell in her body was aching or smarting; so since she felt he wanted her to go as she was going, she loped until her neck was white with foam, and her perspiration was washing down the bloodstains where the spurs had goaded her.

She had whirled through space so rapidly, driven by fear and the spurs, that she was confused as to direction. Coming to a hilltop, she was surprised to see the farm-yard only a hundred yards or so before her. The moment she attempted to turn and run away again, the reins tightened, striking her palate and pulling her head against her neck.

Down the slope she ran and, as she approached the wagon, the man jumped from the saddle. Though she reared a moment in fright, she was so glad to have him off her back that she controlled herself and quieted down immediately.

The farmer, approaching cautiously from the side, loosened the cinch quickly and removed the saddle. The relief of having that sweat-smelling saddle and its blanket taken from her back was so great that Queen shook herself gratefully, following the man eagerly as he led her back into her stall.

Tied in her stall, Queen tried to lick away the wetness from her sides, and she struggled hard to reach back and scratch away the itching along her back and sides where

the saddle had been. In her mouth she felt the painful lump on her palate with her tongue, and she pressed it gently in an effort to take the soreness out of it. She licked away the blood from the corners of her mouth, where the bridle rings had rubbed sores in the delicate skin, and she tried to lick the blood drops from her sides where the spurs had dug holes in her hide.

When the two big horses were taken out of the barn and the barn door was closed, Queen shut her eyes and sank into a doze. What further horrors the future had in store for her, Queen did not know. Terrible as the day had been, and sore as she was all over her body, she had nevertheless survived it all, and in that survival there was a measure of consolation and relief. In that measure of consolation and relief Queen was adjusting herself to her slavery; yet what made her rapid adjustment possible was the vague but implicit faith she kept that somehow, somewhere, sometime, she would manage to break from man's hold upon her and go tearing away to the prairies she loved, beyond all men's ropes and fences.

The next morning, the farmer himself put the saddle on Queen, and though she was again very nervous and afraid, the second riding lesson went by swiftly and with considerably less pain and torture than the first. She began to understand what every pull of the reins meant, and even acquired a feeling for the differences she sensed in the man's voice when he shifted from one order to another. To avoid the dreadful spurs digging at her sides, Queen would spring forward the moment the stirrups moved, their moving indicating that the spurs might strike again.

Day after day, Queen had her lesson of carrying the farmer a few miles over the prairie and, as her fear of this experience and her fear of the farmer lessened, she began to look forward to this chance to see the plains she loved.

One day the boy jumped into the saddle on her back. The farmer stood by and watched. The boy annoyed her by the way he sat and by the way he held the reins. Sometimes she would hear the man angrily instructing him. By the way the boy behaved, changing the annoying things he was doing when his father scolded him, Queen confirmed the feeling she had had earlier that the farmer took her part against the boy. But when the boy got her off on the open plains where his father was not present to scold him, he tormented her without restraint. He kept digging his spurs into her sides even when she was galloping at her best; and he always pulled back on the reins, hurting the corners of her mouth and making it difficult for her to see the stones and badger holes in her way.

In time Queen began to hate the sight of this boy, and to dread his riding her; always, as soon as he appeared, her wild impulses to break free would take possession of her.

Chapter Thirteen

LABOR WITHOUT PURPOSE

JUST WHEN QUEEN had begun to resign herself to the disagreeable task of carrying the big farmer or his thoughtless boy over the plains, having learned to evade punishment by quickly responding to all the signals; just when she had begun to take pleasure in the prairies she loved so much, even when burdened with saddle and rider, regarding this hateful job as an opportunity to be out on the plains she hankered for, they ceased to take her out.

The middle of summer went by, and the winds which rolled golden waves over the ripened grain fields ushered in the harvest season. Heavy harness was thrown over Queen's body and securely lashed to it. Along with two big draught horses she was hitched to the frighteningly noisy binder, and then began a seemingly endless drag of hot, stuffy, exhausting days. Pulling the noisy binder over the grain fields, they would churn up dust under foot, polluting the air they breathed with a mixture of sand and chaff.

After a period of pulling the noisy binder, came the threshing days. Hitched to a hayrack, Queen dragged

the loads of wheat bundles from the fields to the terrifying steam engine thresher. That was followed by a week of dragging heavy, rumbling wagons to the noisy towns. But the most crushing of all the farm labors came after that. Hitched to a handplow with the two other horses, she was obliged to pull with might and main against the cruel, unyielding plow. Queen would be unable to rest at night because her muscles, overstrained all day, ached and gnawed when at last she dragged herself back to the barn. The plow was hard enough to pull when it turned the earth with a slow, resisting grind; but the rocks which the blade would strike unexpectedly, jerking back on the heavy harness, wore painful sores on her shoulders which tormented her night and day.

Queen would follow the farmer out of the barn at dawn with dread. Before the sun had risen, her flanks would be wet and white with perspiration, and her hide would quiver where the harness rubbed on her sores. Often in the haste and eagerness with which she pulled the plow in this to her utterly purposeless labor, Queen would reach back with her bridle-encased muzzle in a futile effort to relieve the itching or the smarting or the burning of some wound. Immediately the farmer's whip would strike out at her rump, and add another stinging jab to all the rest of her aches and pains. Without protesting this rank injustice, Queen would spring forward in agony and pull with a fury which almost dragged the others along.

Queen lost a great deal of weight in that long summer and autumn and her disposition turned crabbed and sour. Her befuddled mind pitted the endurance born of the

hope to escape someday against a stolid despair which hung like a mist over her head. Much of the wild loveliness which had been so much admired in her, by all who had got a fleeting glimpse of her, was gone. She began to look like any of the other draught horses on a farm and to act just like them.

She would come hurrying from the day's plowing to the watering trough in the farmyard, and if the poor fellow who drank ahead of her took too much time to drink, she would neigh in an impatient and ugly manner and hurry him by threatening to bite or to kick at him. She would run for the barn, sometimes pushing one of the other horses aside to get in first—into the very barn she had so violently hated the first time she was forced into it; and standing in her stall through the hours, she lost all desire to communicate with her stolid companions in the next two stalls. If, during the dark, sleepless hours, Queen suddenly thought of the open plains and sent forth a loud protest against her slavery, the two other horses in the barn would resent her disturbance. If they called back rebukingly, or kicked against the partition of their stalls to warn her not to disturb them, she would lose her temper and kick back with such madness that she would damage the boards and hurt her leg.

There came a period of cold, rainy days in which the falling rain laid the dust out upon the plowed fields, making that labor a bit more endurable. But that gave way to a muddiness underfoot which was almost more annoying. When the rain would turn into a steady downpour, the farmer, swearing angrily because he had to give up his

plowing, would take them back to the barn and let them rest.

Indian summer arrived. The dark angry clouds of the rainy period went away. The air became clear and cool and exhilarating. It was the time of the year when Queen had loved the plains most, after the mosquitoes and the nose-flies had vanished, and on her way to and from the fields where they plowed, the old will to rebel rekindled. Queen would raise her weary head, look far beyond the hilltops, and experience the maddening impulse to go tearing away.

Chapter Fourteen

REVOLT

IT WAS the last day of October. Heavily harnessed, Queen was taken out of the barn along with her two stolid mates and led to the watering trough. There was a thin sheet of ice on the water in the trough, and over all the prairie, rolling away from the farmyard to the horizon, lay a delicate blanket of white sparkling frost. The skies were clear and the sun sent out shafts of light green and saffron over the edge of the earth.

Queen broke the ice with her muzzle and the bridle rings hanging at the sides of her mouth, and took a sip. The water was so cold. It made her teeth tingle and, lifting her muzzle, she let the water drip back into the trough. Her head high, she looked far out upon the plains. The longing to go out there upon those frosty stretches of prairie took hold of her being like an iron clamp, and in memory of those happy years in her past when she had raced at will from hilltop to hilltop, she let out a whinny that raced into space and came back to her in a subdued echo from the distance.

The farmer, in back of them, was holding the lines of the three of them; and that cry for freedom taxed his

patience. They were taking too long a time to do their drinking. That the water was icy cold on their warm teeth did not concern him. When Queen, realizing that she had wasted time gazing over the prairies and that she would be thirsty later, tried to hold back, the farmer got angry and struck at her rump with the end of his lines.

Queen went on because she had to, but she carried an additional dissatisfaction; and as she went her head bobbed up and down as she blindly nursed her resentment. And as this subtle seething went on inside of her, her eyes reached out across the miles ahead over the frost-covered grass, the whitish rocks and bushes, and the openness of space.

Suddenly a V-shaped formation of honking geese appeared, coming out of the northern horizon. Completely forgetting herself, Queen stopped to stare. The farmer was exasperated. There had been one delay like this after another this morning. Moving nearer, he gathered up the lines and again struck Queen on the hind legs with the ends of them.

It was not so much the pain of those hard straps that bothered her as it was the general misery of her slavery, and Queen rebelled. She kicked back angrily, almost hitting the farmer in the chest. This made *him* still more angry, and letting out the lines so that he was not so near to those hind legs, he picked up a stone and struck Queen on the spine above her tail. The sting of the blow maddened Queen. Rearing on her hind legs, she pulled and tore at the harness, till she almost tore herself free from the other two horses. They got frightened and pulled on ahead, pulling Queen with them, and the three of them

broke into a clumsy lopé, dragging the farmer along at the end of the lines for a hundred yards or more till he could brace himself against a rock and halt them.

Queen did not understand all the dire threats the farmer was making, but she realized from the tone of his voice that she was to be punished. This feeling, vague and disagreeable as it was, only added to her unhappy discontent; all morning long she was restless and balky, inclined to pull and kick and lay back her ears.

Toward noon, Queen was coming up one of the long furrows, puffing and snorting, the plow behind her and her companions turning the virgin earth when, as they approached the end of the furrow, she saw a man coming on horseback.

Men coming on horseback had been events to reckon with in Queen's life; and as they came to the end of the field, the farmer called out a welcome-sounding halt. Queen had been plodding along with her head high, her dilated eyes fixed on the coming horse. Any visiting horse would have interested her, but this was a white one; and the nearer it came the more certain Queen became that it was her old mate, White-black.

The two horses beside Queen were wholly indifferent, glad chiefly that the strangers' coming gave them a bit of unexpected rest. They settled their weight on their stolid legs, lowered their heads and dozed; while Queen, eyes glowing, trembling restlessly, shattered the air with her excited calling to her mate.

White-black recognized her call. His head rising nervously high, he sprang forward in haste to get to her, but his rider jerked the reins impatiently and forced him

back. With his head back almost up against his rider's chest, White-black champed at his bit and stamped around excitedly.

The man pulled White-black's head back as if he were trying to break it off, and the farmer came to Queen's head and jerked on the lines and scolded her with unmistakable threats. In between threats and scoldings, the farmer and the man exchanged communications; then, to Queen's horror, the man on White-black turned him around and galloped away.

As he loped away, White-black called out unhappily to Queen. Queen, hopelessly tied to the other two horses, answered every call in a manner that was deafening and annoying to the farmer. But even as he scolded her, instead of turning the three of them around and continuing his plowing, the farmer unhooked their traces from the plow and drove them away over the fields to the farm-yard.

Queen was glad that they were not going on with the plowing, but her unsatisfactory meeting with White-black made her confinement to her stall most hateful. She was especially embittered when the two other horses were taken out of the barn, early in the afternoon, and she was left in her stall alone.

The farm wagon rumbled away over the prairie, shortly after the two horses were taken out, and a heavy silence fell upon the farm-yard. Queen pulled at her rope, called frantically, looking back through the open doorway. And to express her resentment against having been left alone, she began kicking at her stall partition.

Suddenly the farmer's boy appeared behind her, scold-

ing her for her noise. Queen sobered down. She had never gotten over her dislike for the boy, but she thought perhaps he would be taking her out to ride over the prairies. There was little pleasure having him ride her, but the longing she had had all day to lope over the plains she loved made even the boy welcome.

Queen let him put the saddle on her until he began tightening the cinch. As usual he was rough with everything he did and, expecting pain, Queen neighed angrily and kicked. The boy was obviously frightened, and he yelled at her with more fear in his voice than threat. But, afraid that her bad behavior might prevent a trip to the prairies, Queen calmed down. She let him put the bridle on her, and when he backed her out, she went so greedily and hurriedly that the boy nervously ordered her to behave.

She tried to be patient as he struggled to mount her, but the moment he gave her the word to go, Queen sprang forward so fast that the boy's frightened voice began ordering her to slow down, and the reins in his hands tightened so that her ears went back far enough to touch him.

The gateway to the avenue between the wire fence was standing open, and even though the boy was trying to turn her to the side, Queen broke into it. Because he was afraid to struggle with her, he let her go.

Queen was a bit timid between those barbed wires and though she went with evident determination, she went cautiously. She came to the point where the avenue between the fences turned at right angles to the east. Again the boy made an attempt to turn her around, but Queen

now had her own passionate notions of where to go and she galloped away to the east.

When she broke out of the avenue, out into the open prairies beyond, and caught her first glimpse of unobstructed space, Queen let herself go with all that she had in her. In vain the boy tried to get her to turn around, pulling with all his strength on one of the two reins. Queen clamped her teeth upon the bit, and because the pain of his violent jerking hurt her, she began to toss her head and to balk.

Rearing on her hind legs, she shook herself violently. She had not expected to be able to shake him off, because she remembered clearly her futile efforts to shake her trainer off. She was simply revolting against his jerking on the reins. But suddenly she felt the saddle slipping loosely from her back and, immediately after, she heard the boy go down to the ground with a thud and a cry.

She jumped forward in terror of what she had done, pulling the reins out of the boy's hands and stepping on them in her excitement. When she turned around to see what had happened, what punishment she was to receive, she saw the boy picking himself up, fifty yards behind her. At the same time, she felt the saddle slipping farther around her side, as if it were a living thing creeping around her. Resting her weight upon her forelegs, she began kicking violently backward.

The blanket fell out and the saddle itself turned completely around; then, in terror of its clinging to her, she reared up on her hind legs and it slipped over her rump and down upon her legs. She sprang forward in a hopping, balking lope and found herself free of everything

but her bridle. The reins which she had in her excitement stepped upon, time after time, were both torn off, one at the bridle-ring, the other dangling to her knees.

As she hopped around, balking and kicking, the boy kept running after her, yelling "whoa" at the top of his voice; his hands raised as if he meant to strike her. Queen glared at him, backing hesitatingly away from him; and then it dawned on her that he had no hold upon her, whatever! The rebellion which had seethed in her all day long flared up into a flame. She turned from him and bolted away.

She raced breathlessly for a long time, before she allowed herself to stop and look back; and when she did, there was no sign of the boy. She was again as free as she had been before they had captured her.

In the north was the faint bluish shadow of the wall of trees along the Saskatchewan River. With her eyes guarding against every shadow, every rock, and every rosebush, she trotted and loped toward the river.

It was evening before she reached the first of the trees and plunged into the shadows of the forest. She hadn't seen a living thing on the open prairies, and she found nothing stirring between the trees. When she came to the canyon slope and down into the open glade, the silence of the river, now frozen over for fifty feet along the shore, was almost oppressive to her. But her fear that the farmer would be coming for her and might see her in the open made even that secluded glade seem unsafe to her.

To one side of the glade, there was a clutter of rocks and windfalls. Between one of the boulders which stood

upright and a windfall whose roots, still caked with earth, made a perfect wall, Queen lay down to rest. She lay down in such a way that she was afforded a clear view across the glade to the point where she had come down the slope.

Here she lay until night. Then she crept out of her hiding place, shook herself and went down to the river shore for a drink. The ice was not yet very thick, and she had little trouble breaking it with her hoof, but she stopped after every stroke to look back up the slope and make sure that no one was coming.

For a short while, she grazed at the edge of the glade, constantly stopping to look up the slope. While she was quite able to graze with the iron bit in her mouth, it was not only discouraging to chew with the thing getting in between her teeth, but the bridle gave her the feeling that the farmer still had some sort of hold upon her; and so she remained in hiding there most of the night.

The feeling that the farmer still had some control over her, though she was out of his sight, kept Queen down by the river all of the next day. But she was very lonely there and was eager to go looking for her companions.

Her loneliness, her intense hunger for her companions, made the little glade unendurable to her, though there was plenty of grass and water. On the third day Queen climbed up the slope, crept through the forest wall that lined the canyon, and went out into the open prairies, even though she knew well enough that men on horseback were likely to be riding along and see her.

For a day and a half she kept close to the shadows between the trees, then she began going right out upon the

open plains, going farther and farther south, eagerly searching the rolling prairies and the pastures for the herd which she knew had been scattered there among the homesteaders.

The last days of the Indian summer went by. The skies began to be continuously gray and dark and snow flurries came in rapid succession. Throughout these lonely days, Queen haunted the prairie solitude and shattered the prairie silence with her shrill, piercing whinnies for her mates.

Then, returning one stormy evening to her den by the river, between the boulder and the earth-caked roots of the windfall, a full-fledged blizzard came. For two days Queen lay encased in a heavy blanket of snow, almost completely covered; then, on the following day, when the blasts had worn themselves out and the sun appeared, she made her way through the deep drifts that were piled up on the slope, and in the forest strip, to the prairies beyond.

She was so hungry now that she immediately selected a spot where the snow was not so deep and began pawing for grass. And she pawed away until the sun was at its highest point in the sky, shining away blindingly over the white prairie sea.

She had been moving toward the tops of a large clump of rosebushes which were high enough to stick up above the deep snows, when suddenly she was startled by a white rabbit who leaped out of the bushes, and hopped away.

Having at first jumped back in fright, Queen became interested in this bit of life and she followed him with

her eyes. A hundred yards away, the rabbit sat down and looked at her. Queen stared back at him till he hopped off again; then, just when he began fading into the distant snows and she was about to go back to her grazing, she discovered a group of horses on the southern skyline. Their bodies, darker than the snow, were cut like silhouettes against the streak of sky beyond them.

Queen forgot about the rabbit and forgot about her grazing. Her eyes lighted up, her nostrils distended, and she sprang forward on a hop through the drifts as if she were trying to imitate the rabbit, calling earnestly as she leaped.

It took Queen half an hour of struggling through the snows to get to a point where they could really hear her. A few rods away from the nearest of them, Queen slowed down into a laborious walk, lifting her feet out of the snow and sinking back into it mechanically, her dilated eyes moving from one to the other.

A few of them raised their heads and watched her as she approached; but the rest of them went on diligently about their business of digging for grass. The horse she approached regarded her with obvious suspicion. She was evidently a work-horse who, still tired from the long season of toil in the traces, was none too energetic in her digging. Afraid of being driven out of her hole in the snow, she was ready in her work-worn crabbedness to rebuff any attempt to rob her of the fruits of her labor. Digging through the deep Canadian snows for a living was not easy, and most horses did not regain the strength they lost in summer labor until they had had a few weeks of winter freedom. The miserable old nag, a red mare

with two naked scars on her shoulders, threatened Queen with an ugly neigh as she went by.

Queen was disappointed by this reception, but she was so happy that she was no longer alone that she moved off slightly to the side, to avoid suspicion, and began pawing a hole for herself in the snow. When she had exposed enough grass for a mouthful, she lifted her head, and chewing the grass slowly because of the bit in her mouth, she looked over the scattered group and studied each of them in his own hole.

They all appeared to be strangers to her. They were too busy to be sociable, but by mid-afternoon several of them began to show signs of being aware of her presence. They were not unfriendly, even if they were indifferent, and several of them came up singly, from time to time, to sniff noses with her. Those who came up appeared to be especially curious about the bridle on her head and the strap hanging down to her knee. One good-natured little bay mare seemed very familiar to Queen. She had the feeling that the little mare had run with her herd at one time, and was very attentive to her. After that the little bay mare followed her eagerly wherever she went.

Toward evening, Queen started back in the direction of the wall of trees, along the canyon, and the little bay mare immediately fell in behind her. Queen saw one here, and one there, fall in after her, and soon the entire group began moving northward in her wake.

When she started plowing through the deep snows between the trees, however, her followers began to hold back. Time after time when Queen turned around to see whether they were coming, she saw that even the little

bay mare was more than a hundred yards behind her, in snow up to her belly, standing still as if she had decided to turn back. But when Queen called to her, she always answered cheerfully and started on again.

When Queen and the little bay mare reached the Saskatchewan, there were only four other horses with them. They were all apparently very glad to be able to drink real water at the ice hole; but when Queen went to her den between the boulder and the earth-caked roots of the windfall, the four who had come down after the little bay mare started back up the incline; the bay mare herself stood a few yards away, looking as if she wanted to follow them; so Queen compromised and with her followed after the other four.

They found the herd lying on the snows, in among the trees at the edge of the wall of forest. Selecting spots near them, Queen and the bay mare spent the night with them, too weary after the first few days of winter digging to be pawing for grass in the night time.

In the morning, when Queen started down again for water, the five who had been down with her followed immediately, and half a dozen others followed them.

By the time they had all made their way up to the prairies again, there was a well-beaten trail down to the river shore. And when Queen started out again for the river, the following evening, the entire herd lined up doggedly behind her.

While the bridle and the dangling strap were a constant annoyance to Queen, reminding her always of the farmer, Queen learned to eat and drink without biting into the hard iron between her teeth. Having gotten the

confidence of this little band, she was quickly becoming quite herself again, even breaking away at times into escapades which enabled her to get into the lead as they ran.

But the greatest joy and excitement in Queen's life, those first winter days and nights, were occasioned by the new arrivals who appeared almost every morning as the farmers in the district released their horses for the winter.

Every morning, as soon as the herd had had its drink down by the river and spread out over the open prairie, Queen would start looking for the new arrivals. She would begin her pawing for grass, would quickly get a mouthful and, chewing it slowly, would peer away over the blinding white spaces for signs of any newcomers who might be seen plowing over the drifts.

And almost every morning, one or more of her own old herd was sure to appear. They would come slowly, and even when Queen recognized them, would not always be as overjoyed on arriving as she would be in seeing them come; but generally, after a day or two, they would appear to be happier and more enthusiastic.

Branded, mutilated, work-worn into crabbedness, they would be quiet, even sullen, sometimes resenting attention, keeping to themselves; yet religiously they stuck to the group.

One morning Queen and the little bay mare were grazing in a single, wide hole off to one side of the group, about a mile away from the strip of woods which lined the canyon, when Queen, looking up, saw half a dozen horses come beating their way through the snows, one

behind the other in single file. She had first seen only the darker ones, but as she looked, she made out a white horse in the lead, his whiteness hard to see against the snow.

"Queen's head went up as high as it could go, and her chewing came to a dead stop. Her eyes riveted on the arrivals, she stood, completely frozen into a statue, the north wind tugging half-heartedly at the long hairs of her tail.

Until they were about five hundred feet away, Queen held herself in readiness, as always, to race for the forest strip; but when it was clear that there were no men with them, Queen climbed out of the hole in the snow and went plodding toward them.

At her first call, the white horse in the lead stopped, raised his head high and whinnied back to her. Then he came hurriedly hopping and jumping over the drifts toward her. Queen knew at once that it was, as she had thought, her old mate, White-black. The cold wintry air rang with her happy welcome!

The noise they made, greeting each other, startled every horse in the group. Heads went up everywhere. Some joined in the excitement by adding their voices to the backward and forward whinnying of Queen and White-black; others, more curious, came plowing toward them to sniff at the noisy newcomer. A few clumsy fellows, hurrying out of their holes to learn what the agitation was about, stepped into the holes of their neighbors; and here and there angry neighing and kicking was added to the general excitement.

Suddenly, as with one single impulse, the group took

off on a chase, and each trying to outrun the next, they churned away over the plains in a rolling cloud of snow dust.

By early afternoon they settled down to the regular business of pawing for grass, Queen and White-black sticking close together. The little bay mare on one side, White-black on the other, Queen began a subtle drawing together of all those who had followed her up the prairies from the south. The little wild herd, which had loved the wilderness and defied man, was slowly being reborn in a new urge to be free.

THE TRAIL OF THE MOOSE

HALF THE LONG winter went by. The bridle on Queen's head remained a continuous annoyance, the strap pulling at the bit in a thousand ways when she lay down or got up, and the iron bit was particularly troublesome during excessively cold nights. Nevertheless Queen learned to keep it from interfering with her feeding and, like all the rest of the herd, not only endured the winter storms, but grew fatter and stronger.

Plenty of grass, plenty of exercise, and the long winter nights of resting in the warmth and the pleasure of companionship, soon took all the kinks out of their overstrained muscles and healed all their harness sores. Their hair grew longer and thicker, and eyes which had been dulled by exacting toil and festering dissatisfaction began to sparkle with the zest of living.

There came a slightly warmer spell in February. The surface of the snows, glistening in the sun all day, froze into harder and harder crusts each night. Where the blizzard blasts had laid out long, horizontal drifts, the equally long troughs between them became hard enough for the

herd to lopé over; and often in the cool late afternoons, after the day's struggle to paw out the necessary grass, they would break away in wild chases along these troughs, like children laughing in play, hurling snow dust from their healthy hoofs, breaking into the drifts to the side, and deliberately plunging into the deeps to their flanks.

They were racing and stampeding up two parallel troughs one lovely winter afternoon, so completely absorbed in the fun of the chase that even Queen was caught off guard. Reaching desperately to get ahead of each other as they raced up a diagonal ridge, they were surprised to see two horsemen coming up the opposite slope of the ridge barely a dozen yards above them.

It took them some time to turn around in the deep snow and, in doing so, they scattered wildly in every direction. They had been racing eastward; and so, as soon as Queen had turned and struggled back toward a trough, she fled westward. So complete had Queen's surprise been that she had had no time to call to her followers, nor to see or know which way White-black or the little bay mare had gone, and for several minutes each one raced his own way, fleeing from the men without daring to look back and see where they might be.

Queen's idea of escape, now that she was suddenly hurled into danger again, was, as it had been all through her life, based on the faith she had acquired in the refuge of the north. When she came to the western end of the trough she was racing in, she swerved north, plunging recklessly into a maze of deep drifts. For several minutes she beat away frantically at the snows that

encased her legs, making only a few yards before she had to pause a moment to regain her breath. She caught sight of the main portion of the herd on a hilltop a quarter of a mile to the east, standing and watching the chase. This was so surprising that she turned to look back; she saw that the two riders had completely ignored the bulk of the herd and had taken after her. They were at the moment plowing through the snows, between White-black and the bay mare and herself, having plainly driven in between them and herself to single her out—*that was unmistakable.*

When she broke back into another trough and raced away to the side, she saw White-black and the bay mare slowly turning south; no longer being followed, and she saw the two riders somewhere in the near distance behind her.

She was now alone, about a hundred yards ahead of the two men; though she ran with all her strength, and on open prairie should easily have been able to outrun them, she knew that there, in those deep snows, she was doomed.

She kept ahead of them for a quarter of a mile; then, coming again to the slope up the ridge, she broke into deep snows once more. Hearing but only half-seeing the two men, as they closed in on her, knowing that there was no hope of getting away once she sank up to her flanks, she made an attempt to get back to one of the harder-crusted troughs, but she slipped and rolled over in the snow. Before she could get to her feet, the two men had leaped down from their saddles. One of them slid down to where she was getting to her feet and seized

the strap, hanging from the bridle, before she could get away. Queen shook the snow violently from her sides and snorted in loud blasts, but she made no attempt to break free from the man's hold.

She was beaten. Now that the man actually held on to the strap, she believed that all struggle and rebellion were futile. She had learned in the bitter experience of her first capture that once man had any sort of grip on her, resistance brought only swift and terrible punishment.

The man held on to the strap with a forcefulness that made itself clear to her in the weight on the corner of her mouth, where the iron bit pressed painfully at her jaw. But he was not only holding on to her, he was for some reason pulling her head down to him; then, to her utter amazement, his other hand came up and began stroking her forehead, warmly and gently, words coming from him with a friendly appealing softness. The other man came up to them very carefully, and he, too, began stroking her forehead and talking in the same ingratiating, kindly way.

Queen pulled back with all her strength and glowered at them with terror, but their voices were so disarming that her ears went up and she tried to get from the sound they were making something of what they meant to do with her.

"I have a right to help her," the first man was saying. "'Tain't right t' let a critter go all winter with a bridle on 'er. 'Tain't fair. Next spring he'll put 'er t' work in the plow again; an' she won't be able t' work hard, not feedin' properly all winter."

The second man kept laughing all the time.

"Goin' t' take 'is bridle back to 'im?" he asked.

"No, I ain't," replied the first. "'Tain't up t' me t' get his harness for 'im. If he want's 'is bridle, let 'im go get it 'imself."

"He'll sue y'u for the cost of the bridle," laughed the second man.

"He'll have a hard time provin' I took it off—unless you go as witness."

"I ain't goin' as no witness f'r 'im, except maybe to help put 'im in jail for workin' a beautiful mare like this one in the plow."

"It's agin the law anyway t' let any critter go with a bridle on. Y'u c'd get the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty t' Animals after 'im."

Queen didn't like this conversation in front of her. In the distance, she heard the rest of the herd milling about, keeping out of reach and yet unwilling to go away. As she looked off to the side and saw some of them standing and looking toward her, anxiously and curiously, the desire to get back to them welled up in her and she made a feeble effort to pull her head back and tear the strap out of the man's hands.

At that, the man pulled her head farther down a moment and his hand reached up to the side of the bridle. Suddenly the thing that had clung to her for weeks loosened and came over her ears. The iron bit, grating across her teeth, fell out of her mouth.

Queen felt her head freed. For a second, she couldn't believe it. In amazement, she raised her head higher to make sure. She knew now that she was free, and yet she was suspicious of her freedom until the two men stepped

back. Queen also stepped back, cautiously, fearfully, expecting any moment to have some piece of rope or leather pull her back into their grasp. As she did so, she saw the two saddle-ponies standing twenty feet away from the men, their bridle straps reaching down to the snow.

She started off slowly and testingly; then when she was convinced that they really had no hold upon her, she sprang forward along one of the troughs and raced breathlessly away to the west.

As she ran she heard other horses running in the distance toward her, but she had the feeling that it was not the saddle-ponies but her own companions who were running toward her. When she came to the spot where it was necessary to turn and strike across several deep drifts, Queen stopped to regain her breath and to look the situation over.

She was happy to see White-black right behind her and the bay mare a few yards behind him, the entire herd converging on them from a wide angle along the south. There was no sign of the horseback men anywhere on the white snows which had settled back into a silent, frozen sea, stretching away lifelessly to the distant winter horizon.

Queen was not altogether sure in her mind whether she had escaped her captors this time because of her skill, or because some incomprehensible miracle had helped her out. Whatever had really happened, despite her gladness at being free again, despite the joyous relief of having no more bridle straps on her head nor the cruel iron between her teeth, it was to Queen a narrow escape, and a danger that might strike again at any moment.

The thought of that danger, up there on the prairies, made her uncomfortable though there was not a thing visible on all the snows wherever she looked; and her inclination to hide again, to get under cover, sent her moving steadily, as fast as she could get the herd to follow, to the forest wall, in among the trees and down the slopes to the river.

The winter evening had spread a glowing sadness over the canyon and the river by the time the herd began breaking holes in the ice for water. So deep was the ice everywhere that only on the holes they had been in the habit of drinking from was the ice thin enough for them to break through.

The sun had gone down in the distant southwest and had left a faint, red glow in the sky above the trees. When most of the herd had drunk their fill, Queen, still restless and worried, went back for a second drink, and her friends stood by along the shore waiting for her.

Queen took her long sips, as she was in the habit of doing, and in order to enjoy the feel of chewing without the hateful bit between her teeth, she chewed the cold water. As it dripped back musically into the ice hole, she gazed away across the Saskatchewan to the forbidden north beyond its dark northern shore. Above the distant trees beyond, now swiftly darkened by the falling night, faint traces of northern lights were flashing across the cold skies.

Suddenly she turned her head to the side. A thousand feet down the shore, one of the many shadows she had been half-consciously noticing seemed to break away from the trees and move. As she peered in that direction,

to make sure that she had really seen the shadow move, it moved again. It was a tree with branches, walking. Queen looked again, frozen motionless with fear and concern; and then she realized that it was not a tree, but a huge animal with antlers, like the branches of a tree. It seemed to be watching her with something of the same fear and concern.

Queen's heart pounded wildly making her pulse knock way up in her ears. It was not a man, that she was sure, nor was it a horse, nor a cow. Through the sides of her eyes, Queen took in the fact that the rest of the herd were also watching it with just as much concern and worry.

She turned toward the slope with the idea of going up to the plains above. Afraid of man on the prairies, she was now afraid of the canyon and the creatures that lived along the river; but as she turned, her eyes still on the moose, she saw the huge creature slip along toward the river as if he were afraid of *them*.

When he got to the river, Queen and all the herd saw him cut clear against the background of the snow-covered river surface. He stared at them for a moment again, fairly shrieking his fear of them, then he ran right out upon the river ice, leaped into a swift and fearful pace and raced away over the ice.

The herd, as well as Queen, were distinctly relieved by the sensing of his fear and his swift flight, and all of them, now that he was gone, trotted curiously over to the point where he had struck the river ice and began to sniff around in the snow. Queen tripped right out upon the ice and gazed after him. Though it was quite

dark, his body was so much darker than the ice that she could still see him go, and she saw that he was almost across, blending into the tree line of the other shore.

From where she was standing, from her very feet, clear across the river, lay the trail of the moose, sharp and unmistakable. A strange, subtle agitation seized Queen. The great refuge of the north, in which she had never lost faith, had opened up to her again.

She lowered her head excitedly and sniffed the trail, then she ran forward a hundred feet or more. The river ice was solid and the covering of snow was only a few inches thick. As she turned to look back to the shore, she saw them all watching her and saw White-black start doggedly after her. Queen called to him encouragingly, and she saw the little bay mare take after him.

Again she called out to them and began walking on. She walked cautiously, calling as she walked and constantly looking back. When she saw in the descending darkness a whole string of figures walking after the little bay mare, she began to trot on ahead.

Halfway across, finding the ice firm under her feet, Queen settled down into a steady, dogged march which she did not halt till she had reached the north shore. By that time, White-black and the little bay mare were only a few feet behind her; when they had gathered together and looked back, all the younger horses, those who had belonged to the wild herd which had come up from the south, were strung out across the frozen river, coming with slow determination.

They spent the night on the north shore and, at dawn, began the trek up the north slopes of the canyon and

through the forest beyond the northern rim, coming out shortly after sunrise to a broad, open plain.

For more than a week, they moved northward as they grazed, coming to a virgin prairie into which few men had as yet ventured at the time.

Wild and unmarred by shanties or fence posts though the land appeared to be, Queen did not yet feel secure, and the migration she had quietly undertaken continued northward, through the spring and into the next summer.

In the fall, having seen no sign of man in all those months, they settled down in a secluded hollow, around a longish pond on the bottom of a muddy flat.

Here they lived and thrived and multiplied, undiscovered and unpursued. Grass and water, leisure and activity, companionship and security, these were all Queen asked of life; and these were as free as the air, in those unfenced wilds, and as limitless in their abundance.

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